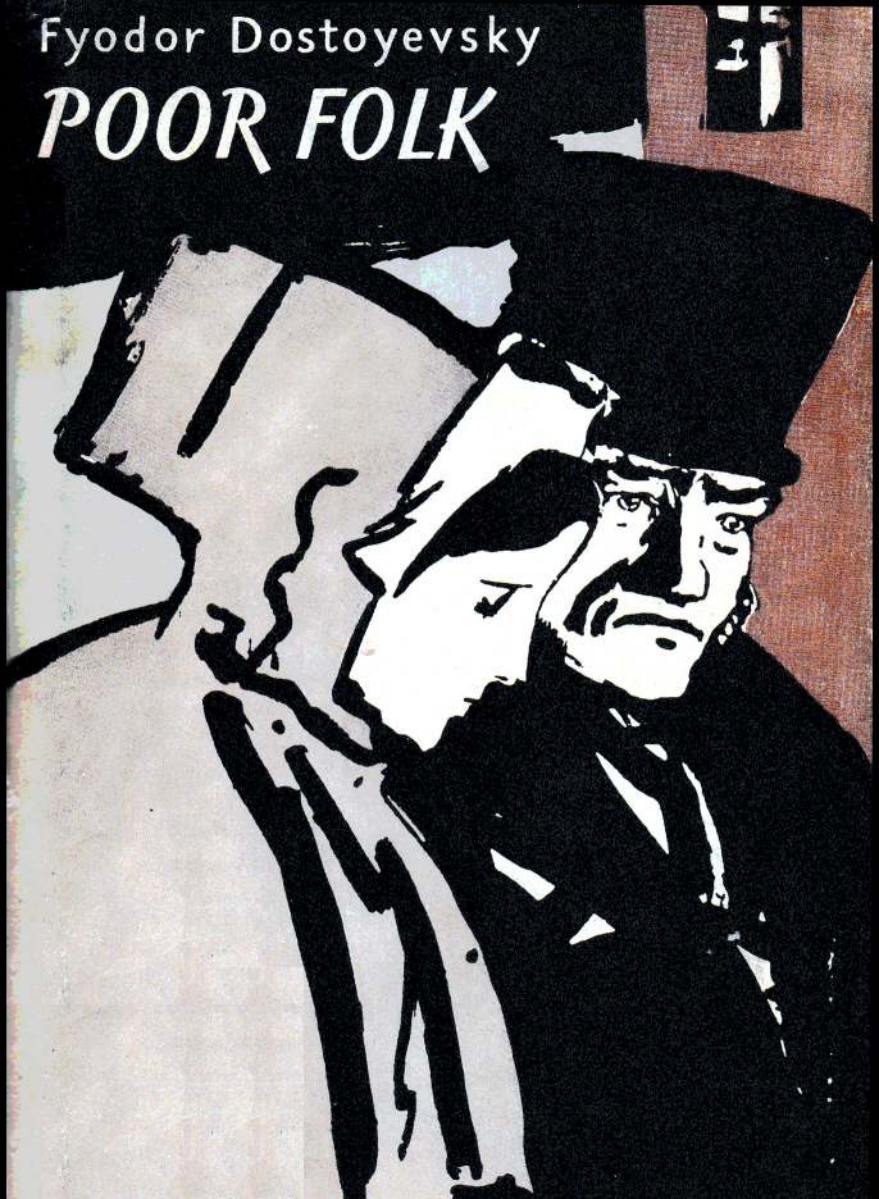
Fyodor Dostoyevsky

POOR FOLK

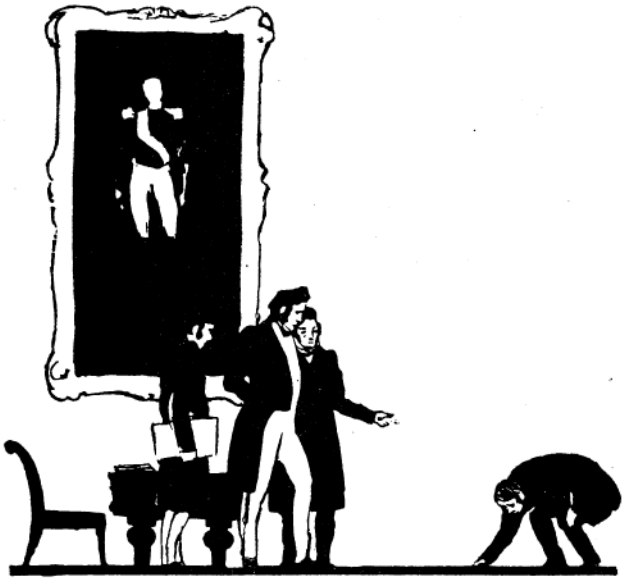


"... Dostoyevsky ... was an outstanding figure of that trend which I have previously defined as chiefly humanistic. In *Poor Folk*, directly influenced by the best aspects of Gogol and the most vital ideas of Belinsky, Mr. Dostoyevsky dealt with the abnormalities of our poor reality with the zest and vigour of a young talent and thereby gave expression to his lofty humanistic ideal."

N. DOBROLYUBOV

"To evoke laughter and yet touch the reader's heart—make him smile through tears—what mastery, what talent!"

V. BELINSKY



Федор Достоевский

БЕДНЫЕ ЛЮДИ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
МОСКВА

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

POOR FOLK

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

Translated from the Russian
by LEV NAVROZOV
Designed by VENIAMIN BASOV

F. M. DOSTOYEVSKY

DOSTOYEVSKY'S LIFE is the tragic story of a great soul affected by the suffering of mankind. His genius raised the heavy crust of social evil, of human sorrow, and itself broke down under the strain.

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) was born in Moscow. His father was a physician at a city charity hospital. In 1843 Dostoyevsky graduated from the St. Petersburg Military Engineering School and entered the designing office of the Ministry of Engineering. Dissatisfied with this occupation, he resigned in 1844 and entered his literary career.

His first work was the novel *Poor Folk*, which made him famous.

Poor Folk was dedicated to the downtrodden people, whom he describes with warmth and sympathy. The leading character, the wretched and despised clerk Makar Alexeyevich Devushkin, was so crushed by life that he feared even to admit that he was unhappy.

The book is written as a series of letters upon which the author makes no comments, and this, indeed, per-

mits him to penetrate the innermost recesses of his hero's mentality, at times ridiculous or even paltry.

A disciple of Gogol and Belinsky, F. M. Dostoyevsky adhered to the finest literary traditions at the outset. His spiritual development, however, was brutally checked: he was tried for his connections with a progressive political circle and received the sentence of death, which was later commuted to exile, after the author had gone through the humiliating ceremony of sham execution.

Ten years later he returned, no longer the man he had been before his ordeal. He had lost his faith in "the very nature of man." He sought support in religion.

The author of *Poor Folk* eventually arrived at that passive Christian love of which A. I. Herzen said: "Passive love may be very strong—it weeps and speaks and wipes its tears, but the trouble is it does nothing."

Having lost his faith in mankind, Dostoyevsky, while exposing social injustice, expressed not a few reactionary ideas, condemning man to a passive contemplation of evil and social regress. The truth of his work has nonetheless survived.

Oh, those story-tellers! Can't they write something useful, pleasant, or enjoyable? No! They must rake up all the dirt. I would forbid them to write altogether. What is the good of it? You read what they write and can't help reflecting—and all sorts of drivel comes into your head. I would simply forbid them to write altogether, I really would!

PRINCE V. F. ODOYEVSKY

April 8

My darling Varvara Alexeyevna,

I was so happy last night, so impossibly happy! For once in your life, my obstinate darling, you did as I asked. It was eight in the evening when I awoke (as you know, my dear, I am fond of taking a nap after work). I fetched a candle, laid out my papers and was just trimming my pen when I happened to

look up and—how my heart did leap! So you understood what I wanted, what my heart desired! The corner of your curtain was fastened to the balsam pot just as I had suggested. It seemed to me even that your little face glimmered at the window, that you were peeping out, thinking of me. And how sorry I was, my little dove, that I could not clearly see that dear little face of yours. Ah, there was a time when I too could see well. Old age is no blessing, my darling: everything is blurred and a little writing in the evening makes one's eyes so sore and tearful in the morning that one is ashamed to be seen by strangers. But my mind was lit up by that smile of yours, my little angel! That sweet smile of yours! And I felt as I did the time I kissed you, remember? It even seemed to me, darling, that you were rebuking me with your tiny finger. Now, did you? You must tell me all about it in your next letter.

And what do you think of our trick with the curtain, dear? Precious, isn't it? When at work, going to bed, or waking, I at once know that you are thinking of me over there, that you remember me, that you are well and cheerful. Dropping the curtain means: "Good night, Makar Alexeyevich!" And raising it means: "Good morning, Makar Alexeyevich, I hope

you've slept well," or "How do you feel, Makar Alexeyevich? As for me, I am healthy and well, praise the Lord!" See, how it works, dearest; it makes even letters unnecessary! Clever, isn't it? And I thought it up myself! I am good at such things, don't you think?

Then, I may tell you, my dear little Varvara Alexeyevna, that contrary to expectations, I slept very well all night, which is very satisfactory. One never sleeps well in new places. If it isn't one thing, then it's another to keep you awake. I got up this morning as cheerful and fresh as a lark. And what a morning it was, my dear! The window was thrown open, the sun was shining, the birds were singing, there was spring fragrance in the air and all of nature was alive—and everything else was in harmony too, everything as it should be in the spring. I even did some pleasant musing this morning, and all about you, my dear. I compared you to a little bird in the sky created for the solace of man and the beauty of nature. Here, it occurred to me, Varenka, that we humans living in care and worry, ought to envy the carefree and innocent birds in the heavens—and so on in this vein, drawing various vague and pleasing comparisons. I have a book, Varenka, and in it you will find very

many things of this kind, and in great detail too. All sorts of dreams come to my mind, my dear, and I can't help writing about them. Now that it is spring they are so bright and entertaining, so tender, and all in a rosy hue. That is why I am writing like this. But to tell you the truth, I got it all from the book. The author's longing is so like my own, and all in verse:

Were I but a bird, a soaring bird of prey!

And so it goes on; and there are other ideas too. But never mind! Better tell me where you went this morning, Varvara Alexeyevna. I was not nearly ready to go to work when you came fluttering from your room so cheerfully. It was a joy to look at you! Ah, Varenka, Varenka! Don't grieve, tears won't help. Believe me, my darling, I have learned this from experience. And besides, you have peace now, and your health is better. And how is Fedora? What a good woman she is! Write to me, Varenka, and tell me how you get on together. Is everything satisfactory? Fedora grumbles a little, but never mind. She is such a good woman, God bless her.

I have already written about our Theresa—she is a good and honest woman too. I was so

worried—how would we pass our letters to each other? And here, God luckily sent us Theresa. She is a kind soul, so meek and obliging. But our landlady is merciless and works her to the bone.

What a place I have come to, Varvara Alexeyevna, a regular slum. What apartments! I used to live like a hermit, as you know: it was so peaceful and still that you could hear the buzzing of a fly. And here there is noise, shouting, tumult. But I didn't tell you what the place is like. Just imagine a long corridor, very dark and dirty. To the right there is the bare wall, and on the left a row of doors like in a hotel, rooms tenanted by one, two or three persons. It's all a jumble, a real Noah's ark! And yet, they seem to be good people, well bred and educated. One of them is a clerk (somehow, connected with literature), a well-read man who knows a good deal about Homer, Brambeus* and all sorts of other writings, and about everything—an intelligent man. Then there are two army officers who are always playing cards, also a naval officer, and an English tutor. But wait for my next letter, dear-

* *Baron Brambeus*—the pen-name of O. I. Senkovsky, a miscellaneous writer popular in the forties.—*Ed.*

est. To amuse you, I shall describe them satirically, just as they are and in detail. Our landlady is a very small and slovenly old woman who walks about in a dressing-gown and slippers and keeps shouting at Theresa all day. I live in the kitchen, or rather it is this way: right next to the kitchen there is a room (and our kitchen, I must say, is a very good one, clean and bright); the room is not large, just a cubby-hole ... or I had better say that the kitchen is large and has three windows and is partitioned to form another room, an extra lodging as it were. It is roomy, comfortable, and has a window. And here I live. In short, it is all very satisfactory. Now don't think there is some hidden meaning in all this, my darling, that the room is only a part of the kitchen! Though I do live in that room behind the partition, it doesn't matter—I have my privacy, keep to myself, live quietly and alone. For furniture I have a bed, a table, a chest of drawers, and two chairs. Also, I have put up an icon. True, there may be better rooms than mine, far better perhaps, but the main thing is comfort, isn't it? And so I have done it all for comfort, and don't think for a moment that I had anything else in view. And your window is just across the courtyard, and the courtyard

is narrow, and I can see you pass, and it will be all the more cheerful to a lonely man. And cheaper too! The dearest room in the house costs thirty-five rubles with board—more than I can afford. Now my room costs twenty-four and a half with board, while I used to pay a full thirty and had to deny myself many things. Before, I could not always afford tea, and now I can save enough to have both tea and sugar. Somehow I am ashamed to do without tea, my dear; everyone is respectable here and it is embarrassing. That is why one drinks tea, dearest; for the sake of others, for appearances, for good tone. If not for this I would not care, I am not the fussy sort. And if you put some money aside for emergencies, for shoes, or some bit of clothing, what will remain? And there goes the whole of my salary. It is not that I'm grumbling, it has been adequate for years and sometimes I receive bonuses as well.

Well, good-bye, my angel. I have bought a few pots of balsam and geraniums for you—it was cheap. And perhaps you are fond of mignonette? They have mignonette too—you just write to me, but please set everything down in greater detail. And by the by, my dearest, have no thoughts or doubts on my account

just because I have rented such a room. It was comfort which made me do this, nothing but comfort. I am saving money, my darling, setting it by to feather the nest. I may look like something that a fly could overturn with its wing, but come to think of it, I am not like that really, I know what I'm about: I have the character of a man who is firm and serene of soul. Good-bye, my little angel! I find that I have written two full sheets, and I should have gone to work long ago. I kiss your little fingers, my darling, and remain

Your most humble servant and truest friend,
Makar Devushkin

P. S. There's one thing I beg of you: write to me, dear, as fully as possible. I'm sending you a pound of sweets, Varenka, I hope you'll enjoy them, and for the love of God feel no uneasiness about me. And so, once again, good-bye, my darling.

April 8

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am afraid I shall have to quarrel with you after all. I assure you, my good Makar Alexeyevich, that it is really difficult for me to accept your presents, knowing as I do what

they have cost you, what deprivations, what self-denial. How many times have I told you that I need nothing, absolutely nothing? You know that I cannot repay the kindnesses you shower upon me. Why have you sent those flowers? A sprig of balsam would not have mattered, but why the geraniums? One has only to say an unguarded word, as I did about geraniums, and off you go to buy them! And they must have been dear. But they are beauties—little crimson crosses of flowers. Wherever did you get them? I have put them in the most conspicuous place at the window. I shall also put a bench beneath, and on the bench more flowers—just wait till I'm a little richer. Fedora never gets tired of looking at them. It is heavenly here now—so clean and bright. But why the bon-bons? Your letter made me feel that there is something wrong—there is too much of paradise, and spring, and fragrance, and singing birds. I was sure there would be poetry too. You should have written some verses, Makar Alexeyevich! The rest was all there—the tender feelings, the rosy fancies and what not! As for the curtain, I had never given it a thought. It probably got caught when I set the plants down. So there!

Ah, Makar Alexeyevich! No matter what you say or how you try to convince me that all of your money is spent for your own needs, you cannot conceal anything from me. I can see that you deny yourself bare necessities for my sake. Whatever made you rent such a room, where you are constantly troubled and annoyed, where you are cramped and uncomfortable? You are fond of privacy, the one thing you will not find there. And you could live far better, too, judging by your salary. Fedora says that you used to live much better. Can it be that you have spent all your life alone, in want and gloom, with never a friendly word, in odd corners rented from strangers. My kind friend, how my heart aches for you! But at least try to keep well, Makar Alexeyevich. You say that it hurts your eyes to write by candle light. Then why do so? Surely, your employers know how diligent you are as it is.

Once more, I implore you not to spend so much money on me. I know you love me, but you are not rich. This morning I too rose in good spirits. I felt so very cheerful. Fedora had been at work for a long time, she had brought work for me too. This made me so happy; I just went to buy some silk and then took up my work. All morning I felt light-

hearted and cheerful. But now I'm sad again and my heart is heavy.

What is to become of me? What awaits me in the future? It is so depressing to be uncertain, to have no prospects or even a faint idea of what will happen. And the past was so awful that the mere thought breaks my heart. To the end of my days I shall weep because of the wicked people who wrecked my life.

But it is growing dark and I must set to work. I should have liked to write much more, but there is no time: the work is urgent and I must hurry. It is good to write letters, of course; one is not so lonely. But why don't you ever come to us? Why so, Makar Alexeyevich? Now you have not far to go and surely you can find the time for this. Please, do come! I have just seen your Theresa. She was looking so ill and I felt so sorry for her that I gave her twenty kopeks. Oh, I have almost forgotten: please, give me a full account of the way you live. What sort of people live with you and how do you get on with them? I should very much like to know. See that you set it all down. Tonight I shall purposely loop up the corner of my curtain for you. Go to bed earlier—yesterday I saw your candle burning until nearly

midnight. Well, good-bye! Just now I am sad and tired and lonely. It's the sort of day we have had. Good-bye.

Your friend,
Varvara Dobrosyolova

April 8

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

Yes, my darling, my very own, such is the day that has fallen to my miserable lot. You have surely had your fun with me, an old man, Varvara Alexeyevna! But it is my fault, my own entirely. An old man with scarcely a few hairs, dallying with cupids and sentiments! Yet, I'll say this, dearest: man is a strange creature sometimes; he will talk such frightful nonsense and go to such lengths—good heavens! And what comes of it all, what follows? Nothing at all, except such rubbish from which the Lord preserve us! I'm not angry, my darling, but simply annoyed to think that I should have written to you in that stupid and flowery manner. Today I went to work happy as a king. There was such a radiance in my heart, a holiday in my soul. In short, I did feel jolly! At first I took to my papers zealously

enough, but later, when I looked about, everything was as drab and gloomy as before. The ink spots were the same, the tables and the papers, and I too was the same. Then why had I climbed on to the back of Pegasus? What had made me do such a thing? Because the sun had shone upon me and turned the sky to blue? What sort of fragrance could there have been when God knows what things happen in the courtyard under our windows. It must have come from my foolish fancy: one may stray so far as to forget oneself completely—out of sheer excess of foolish ardour. But on the way home, this evening, I rather dragged myself along than walked. Besides, for some reason or other, my head began to ache. It is always one thing after another. Perhaps the wind had chilled my back: I was so glad for the spring that, fool that I was, I had gone out only in a thin service coat.

Let me say that you have mistaken my feelings, you have misunderstood them altogether. It was fatherly affection, pure fatherly affection, Varvara Alexeyevna. In your lonely orphanhood I have taken the place of your father. I say this in all sincerity, as a true relative should. I am after all a distant relative of yours, am I not? A very, very distant relative,

of course, but a relative just the same—and now I happen to be your closest relative and protector, because where you should have received help and protection you found treachery and insult. As for verses, I may say, my very own, that it is not seemly for a man of my age to indulge in poetry-making. Poetry is trash. Little boys nowadays get spanked for it in school. That is what I think of it, my dear.

Why do you write about comfort and peace and all the rest, Varvara Alexeyevna? I am not finicky and need little. I have never been better off than now. Why should I be so particular in my old age? I have enough to eat, some clothes and shoes. Why bother with extravagances? I'm not of a princely stock. No, my father was not of the nobility. He kept a family on an income lower than mine. Nor am I a milksop! Yet, if the truth be told, my old home was much better. I felt more at home there, my dear. My present room is good enough, of course, and in some respects more cheerful and, if you like, more lively. I can't say anything against it, but I miss the old room just the same. We old people, that is, elderly people grow attached to things. The room was small, you know, and the walls.... Well, the walls

were, of course, like any other walls. Walls are nothing. It is the memories that make me sad. Strange that they should make me so miserable because they are quite pleasant in themselves. Even the things that were bad and once annoyed me now seem good and pure. We used to live there so quietly, I and the old lady who is now dead. Thinking of her makes me sad too. She was a good woman and never overcharged for her rooms. She was always making patchwork quilts with very long knitting needles. We shared the same candle and so worked at the same table. Her little granddaughter Masha—I still remember her as a baby—must be a girl of thirteen now. What an imp she was, always up to something, and how she made us laugh. And that is how we lived together, the three of us. During the long winter nights we would have tea at the round table and then set to work. To amuse the child and keep her out of mischief, the old woman would tell stories. And what stories they were! Not only a child, but a grown-up and sensible person too could forget himself listening. Even I sat there smoking a pipe and listening until I forgot all about my work. And the child, that little piece of mischief, would rest her rosy face on her

tiny hand, her pretty mouth half-open. And if the story was at all frightening she would press closer to her grandmother. Didn't we love to look at her then! And there we sat forgetting the flickering of the candle, the wind in the yard and the swishing of the snow. Yes, it was a good life, dearest, and we lived together that way for nearly twenty years. But I'm carried away. The subject, perhaps, does not interest you at all and I find it none too easy to think about it, especially now. It is growing dark. Theresa is fussing with something or other; my head aches and my back hurts a little, and my thoughts are so odd and rambling as if in pain too. I am sad today, my dear.

But what was that you wrote, my darling. How can I come to visit you? What will people say? If I cross the courtyard there will be questions, talk and gossip. They will say the wrong things. No, my little angel, I had better see you tomorrow at Vespers—that will be better and less harmful to us both. Please forgive me for writing a letter like this, my dear: reading it again I see that it is all made up of odds and ends. I am an old man, my dear, old and ignorant. When I was young I learned very little and now nothing will stay

in my mind even if I should try to learn from the beginning. I dare say, my dear, that I am no master at describing things; and without being told or laughed at, I know that whenever I try to put things down in a more fanciful way, I only manage to scratch together a heap of nonsense. I saw you at the window today—drawing down the blind. Good-bye, good-bye, and may God keep you. Good-bye, Varvara Alexeyevna.

Your devoted friend,
Makar Devushkin

P.S. I cannot write satirically any more about anyone, dearest. I am too old to snigger and grin, Varvara Alexeyevna! And people would laugh at me and remember the old Russian proverb that he who digs a pitfall for his neighbour shall fall into it himself.

April 9

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Are you not ashamed to give way to such moods and tantrums, my friend and benefactor? Could I really have hurt you? I know I'm often thoughtless, but I never imagined that you would take my words as a

jest at your expense. I assure you that I could never make fun of your age or character. It is simply my thoughtlessness, and still more that I am terribly bored; and what doesn't one do out of boredom? To tell you the truth, I supposed that you had been jesting in your letter. My heart was heavy when I saw that you were so displeased. My friend and helpmate, you will wrong me if you suspect me of unfeelingness and lack of gratitude. I am well able to appreciate all you have done for me by protecting me from my enemies, from their hatred and persecution. I shall always pray for you—and if God ever hears my prayers, you will be happy.

I'm quite unwell today; I shiver and flush by turn and Fedora is worried. You should not be ashamed to come and see me, Makar Alexeyevich. Let other people mind their own business. We are well enough acquainted, aren't we? Good-bye, Makar Alexeyevich—I have said all that there is to say and am too unwell to write more. Again, don't be angry with me and be assured of the constant respect and attachment of

Your most devoted and humble servant,

Varvara Dobrosyolova

April 12

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

What is the matter? What is wrong? You're always frightening me! In every letter I plead with you, beg you to be more careful, wrap yourself well, stay at home in bad weather, be sensible in all things. But you disobey me, my darling angel, like a little child. I know you're as frail as a blade of grass, that you catch cold at the slightest puff. You must be careful, dearest, and look after yourself, and avoid everything dangerous, and spare your friends the grief and worry.

You wanted to know all about my daily life and surroundings? With the greatest of pleasure, my love. But let me begin at the beginning. The stairs at the front of the house are quite elegant, especially the main stairway: it is bright, clean, and spacious, and the banisters are all mahogany and metal work. But of the back stairs, the less said the better: they twist about, damp and dingy, and the steps are all crumbling, and the walls are so grimy that your fingers stick when you touch them. Every landing is piled high with boxes, chairs and old wardrobes and there are lines of washing. Most of the windows are broken

and everywhere there are tubs filled with dirt, litter, egg shells and fish bladders. And the smell is abominable.... In a word, it isn't nice.

As for the rooms, I told you how they are arranged: convenient enough, but a little, well—stuffy. I don't mean to say that they actually smell bad—they merely give off a sickly sweet odour. At first it is annoying, but you grow used to it in a few minutes because everything here smells—even your clothes, and hands. But the canaries soon die. The naval officer who lives here has just bought his fifth—they just can't stand the air. It's too sour in the morning when the fish and meat are cooking and the kitchen is sloppy; but in the evening it is wonderful. The kitchen is bright and large and is full of old washing hung out to dry and the smell is a little bothering since my room adjoins. But never mind, one can get used to it if one lives here long enough.

The house is astir from earliest dawn: everybody is getting up, walking and stamping about. Some have to go to work and those who don't get up just the same. First we all have our tea. Most of the samovars belong to the landlady and since there are not enough

of them, each has to wait his turn. If anyone comes along with his kettle out of turn the entire company will pounce upon the culprit. It happened to me, too, the first time—but that is not worth mentioning. It was on that occasion that I got acquainted with everyone. The naval officer was the first. He is a confiding soul and told me all about his father, mother, and sister (who is married to an official in Tula) and about the town of Kronstadt. He offered me his protection and then and there invited me to tea. I found him in a room where card playing never ends. After tea they insisted that I should join them, seriously or not I cannot say. They had been playing all night and were still at it when I entered. There was the shuffling of cards and the scratching of chalk and the place reeked of tobacco. When I refused to gamble, I was told to stop talking philosophy. After this no one spoke to me at all. And to tell the truth, I didn't mind. I won't go there any more. Gamblers, that's what they are, gamblers! The writer also arranges parties in his room. But here it is all very innocent, respectable, delicate, and on a high level.

To this I may add, Varenka, that our landlady is a vicious old woman, a regular witch.

You've seen Theresa and know how thin she is: like a plucked chicken. There are only two servants—Theresa and Faldoni. Perhaps Faldoni has some other name, but he answers to Faldoni. And so everyone calls him Faldoni. He is a red-head, a twisted lout with a pug nose and always wrangling with Theresa—they nearly come to blows. On the whole, I would say that life here is not so pleasant. Never are they all asleep at once—always there are some playing cards; and sometimes there are things of which I am ashamed to speak. I've grown used to it myself, but can't help wondering how the family people can bear to live in such a bedlam. There is a poor family in the room on the other side of the hall, a corner room somewhat apart from the others. They are quiet folk, hardly noticeable and live there so very still behind their partitions. The father, Gorshkov by name, is an unemployed clerk who was discharged for something or other seven years ago. He is a little grey-headed man and walks about so ragged that it hurts to look at him. His waistcoat is even worse than mine, a sad little stick of a man! (We meet in the corridor at times.) His knees are wobbly and his hands and head are also shaky, from some sickness

or God knows what! He is a timid sort, shy of everyone, and keeps to himself. I too may seem bashful at times, but he is even worse. He has a wife and three children. The eldest boy is as puny as his father. The wife must have been pretty once—one can see it even now. But she is clothed in rags, poor thing. They are behind with their rent, I have heard. The landlady, at any rate, is not very kind to them. I have also heard that Gorshkov lost his post through some trouble or other; something to do with a lawsuit or investigation; I can't say for sure. But they are poor, God, how poor! There is never a sound from their room, as though not a soul lived there. Even the children can't be heard. I have never seen them frisk about or play. A bad sign! As I passed his door one evening when the house was unusually still, I heard a sob, then a whisper, and another sob. Someone seemed to be weeping so subdued and pitifully that it wrung my heart. I kept thinking about them all night and could not fall asleep.

Well, good-bye, my Varenka, my priceless little girl. I have described everything as well as I could. I have been thinking of you and you alone all day. I'm so worried about you, darling. I know you need a warm coat for these

Petersburg springs with their winds and their rains and their snows—they'll be the death of us, Varenka. God save us from this mellow season! Don't be angry, my heart, for the way I write. I have no style, none at all. I wish I had. I write what comes to my mind in the hope of cheering you a little. If I had had a decent education, it would be different. But what sort of an education did I have, a kopek's worth, not more!

Your constant and faithful friend,
Makar Devushkin

April 25

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Today, I met my cousin Sasha! It was awful! She is going to ruin! Rumours have reached me, too, that Anna Fyodorovna has been making inquiries about me. Will she ever leave me alone? She wants to *forgive* me, to let bygones be bygones and intends to call upon me soon. She claims that you are no relative of mine, that she is closer to me, that you have no right to meddle in our family affairs, and that I ought to be ashamed to be living on your charity and support. She says

that I have forgotten her hospitality, that it was she who saved my mother and me from starvation, that for two and a half years she was put to great expense feeding us, and above all that she was quite willing to forgive our debts. She did not spare even my poor mother. If mama could have only known what they did to me! But God sees all! Anna Fyodorovna says that I have myself to blame for the loss of my happiness, that she showed me the way, and that it is no fault of hers that I could not or perhaps would not save my reputation. Then whose fault is it, dear God! She says that Mr. Bykov is quite right and that no man can be expected to marry a woman who.... What is the good of writing about this? It is hard to bear such injustices, Makar Alexeyevich! I barely know what is happening to me. I sit here, trembling, sobbing and weeping. It took me two hours to write this letter. I was sure she would at least realize and admit how she has wronged me. But there you are! And don't worry, my one and only benefactor! Fedora always exaggerates. I am not ill. It is only a slight chill that I caught yesterday when I went to Mass at Volkovo. Why didn't you come with me? I had begged you to. Ah, my poor, dear mama—if you could rise from

the grave, if you could know and see what they have done to me!

V. D.

May 20

Varenka, my dove,

I am sending you some grapes, my heart, because grapes are good for convalescents. The doctors too recommend them to quench thirst—and that is why I've sent them, just against thirst. Yesterday you wanted some crullers. And so, I've sent you some. How is your appetite, darling? That is the main thing, after all. Thank God that it is all over and that our troubles are coming to an end. Let us thank heaven for that. As for the books, I haven't been able to get them yet. They say there is a very good book here, very beautifully written. A very good book, they say. I haven't read it myself, but everyone praises it and they have promised to lend it to me too—but will you read it? You are so fastidious—it is difficult to suit your taste. I know that well enough, my dear. You probably desire something poetic, something full of sighs and love. I'll get it for you, never fear. They also have a notebook of copied verses.

As for me, I'm quite well. So please don't worry, my darling. And pay no attention to what Fedora says. Tell her she is an old gossip. Just tell her so! I have not sold my new uniform. And why should I? Whatever for? I have heard that I am going to receive some forty rubles of extra pay. Why should I sell it then? So don't worry, my darling. Fedora, you know, is so fussy, so fussy and nervous. There are happy days to come! If only you get well, my angel. Get well for the love of God, don't disappoint an old man! Who told you that I've grown thin? It's gossip again, just slander! I'm as healthy as can be and have grown so stout that I'm actually ashamed of myself—in short, I'm living in clover. If only you would get well! Now, good-bye, my loving angel. I kiss your little fingers one by one and ever remain

Your eternal friend,
Makar Devushkin

P.S. But what is that you're writing about, my love? Be reasonable! How can I come to visit you so often? How can I do such a thing? You can't expect me to come except under cover of dark. Now can you, my dear? And what dark-

ness is there left of the nights in this season? And when you were so ill and your mind was wandering I scarcely left your bedside. How I was able to do it I can hardly understand. But I had to go away because of the talk and the gossip. Even so the tongues are already wagging. I completely trust Theresa—she is not talkative. But just imagine what it would be like if they knew more about us, what they would think and what they would say! Have patience, darling, and wait till you get well. We'll have our rendezvous then.

June 1

My esteemed Makar Alexeyevich,

I have wished so much to do something you would like, to please you in some way for all the affection you have shown me, that I at last rummaged my chest of drawers and found this old copybook which I send you. I began it in happier days and continued it at intervals. You often asked me about the past, about my mother, about Pokrovsky, and my life with Anna Fyodorovna, and finally about the more recent troubles. You were so eager to read these notes, in which, God knows why, I have set down—whenever I had time—various

scenes of my past, that I am sure they will give you pleasure. As for me, I am saddened when I read them. I seem twice as old to myself as I was when I wrote the last lines. Good-bye, Makar Alexeyevich. I'm so weary and lonely and suffer from sleeplessness. What a tiresome convalesence.

V. D.

I

I was fourteen when my father died. My childhood was the happiest time. My father was the steward of the vast estate of Prince P. in the Gubernia of T. And there we lived happily, quietly and unnoticed in one of the villages of the prince, far, far from here. I was a restive child, and always running about the gardens, the meadows and the woods. Father was always busy with the affairs of the estate, and mother with housekeeping so that I was left to myself. There was no one to teach me and I was the happier for it. Early in the morning I would run to the pond, to the grove, to the haymakers or to the reapers—never caring if the sun was scorching or I had roamed far from the house, whether I had scratched my hands and face in the bushes

and torn my dress. What did it matter if they would scold me for this at home afterwards.

I should have been happy to spend all my life in that village, but it was ordered otherwise: I was still a child, twelve years old, when we moved to St. Petersburg. It hurts me to remember how we made ready for the journey, how I wept as I took leave of everything so dear to me, how I hung on my father's neck pleading to stay a little longer. Father was annoyed and shouted at me. Mother wept and said that we had to go because of papa's affairs. The old Prince P. had died and his heirs dismissed my father who had invested a little money with private persons in St. Petersburg and now thought that his presence in the capital would improve our circumstances. My mother told me of this afterwards. Arrived in the capital, we settled in Petersburg Storona where we stayed until my father died.

How hard it was to get used to the new life. We had come to the city in the autumn. But it was on a bright sunny day that we left the village; it was warm and gay. The field work was nearly done. The threshing floors were stacked with grain and the birds fluttered noisily overhead. Everything was so bright and joyous. And when we arrived in the city

there was nothing but rain, the murky cold and slush of autumn under a gloomy sky. There were crowds of strangers, inhospitable, hostile and morose. But eventually we settled down—after much noise and the usual bother of arranging a household. Papa was hardly ever at home, and mama too was constantly busy. I was completely forgotten. And how sad it was on that first morning after our arrival! Our windows opened upon a yellow fence and the mire in the street below was never dry. There were few that passed, and all huddled in their coats to keep out the wind.

Our home too was oppressive and dreary all day. We had scarcely a relative or a friend. Father was not on speaking terms with Anna Fyodorovna (he owed her some money). Our frequent visitors were his business associates who usually wrangled, argued and shouted. Such visitors always left him down-hearted and out of temper. For hours on end he would pace the room brooding. Mama was afraid to speak to him then, and I too would sit as quiet as a mouse in some corner, book in hand. Three months after our arrival in St. Petersburg I was sent to a boarding-school and what a sad time I had among strangers. All were so unfriendly, the teachers for ever shouting,

the girls poking fun at me, and I feeling so uncouth. It was all so strict and exacting: there were regular hours for everything, for our common meals, and our lessons which were so dull. It was all so disheartening, tormenting. At first I could not even sleep, but lay weeping all the night; those endless wretched nights! As we sat doing our lessons in the evening and I pored over my verbs and sentences, afraid even to stir, my thoughts would wander home, to father and mother, to my old nanny, to the fairy-tales she used to tell and—the misery was more than I could bear. It was a pleasure to think of even the littlest things at home and to wish and wish that I were there, that I could be sitting in that small room of ours with the samovar steaming, with familiar faces about, and everything so cosy, snug and warm. Wouldn't I hug my mother, hug and squeeze her! As I sat there thinking I would weep stealthily until the lessons were quite forgotten, and all night I would be dreaming about the teacher, the head mistress and the girls, and would imagine that I were conning my lessons, but in the morning was never the wiser. In punishment they would make me stand on my knees and give me only one course at dinner. I was

always sad. At first the girls used to laugh at me, tease me, deliberately put me out when I was answering the teacher's questions; they would pinch me as we walked in pairs to dinner or tea and would complain to the head mistress about me on the slightest pretext. But how wonderful it was when my nanny would come for me on Saturday evenings. How madly I would hug and kiss her. She would wrap me up well and off we would go—but she could hardly keep the pace as we walked home. And I would be chattering away about one thing or another until home at last gay and light-hearted, I would hug and kiss everyone as though I had been away for ten years. And what a commotion there would be, what talking and what stories. To everyone I would run with a greeting; I would laugh and shout and scamper about. Then there would be earnest talk with papa about my lessons and the teachers and the French language and Lomonde's Grammar and everybody would be happy and content. Even now I smile at the memory. For my father's sake I did my best to learn my lessons well—I saw that he was spending his last kopek on me, that he was making shift, God knows how. Every day he grew sadder, more discontent and irritable. It

grew difficult to get along with him. His affairs went from bad to worse and he was hopelessly in debt. Mother was afraid even to weep or to say anything—he grew angry so quickly. She began to sicken, grew thin and contracted an evil cough. Returning from school I would find everybody sad, father angry and mother with reddened eyes from secret weeping. There would be reproaches and high words. Father would complain that I gave him no joy, no consolation, that he had spent his last coin on my education and I had not even learned to speak French. In short, mother and I were blamed for all failures and misfortunes. And how he would torment my mother! The very sight of her wrung my heart. Her cheeks were hollow, her eyes sunken—and she was so pale. But the worst fell to my lot. It always began with some trifle and then went to God knows what lengths. Often I lost track of what it was all about. All sorts of things were held against me: my poor French, that I was a dunce, that the head mistress was a stupid woman who neglected her duties and cared nothing for our morals, that he, my father, had not yet found a situation, that Lomonde's Grammar was a poor book, much worse than Zapolsky's, that a lot of money

had been wasted on me, that I was callous and unfeeling. In short, no matter how hard I struggled with my verbs and sentences, I was to blame for everything. And it was not that my father did not love me; on the contrary: he doted on mother and me. It was simply his character.

Harassed by his worries and failures, my father became moody and suspicious. Often on the verge of despair, he began to neglect his health, caught a chill and after a short illness died so suddenly that for a few days we were stunned and could hardly believe he was gone. Mother fell into a stupor which made me fear for her reason. No sooner had papa died than his creditors sprang up on all sides and descended on us in a body. Whatever we had, we had to give up. The little house, that father had bought in Petersburg Storona some six months after our arrival, had to be sold as well. How the affairs were finally settled I do not know, but we remained homeless, shelterless and without means. Mama was wasting away from a painful disease; there was no food; we had nothing to live on; there was no hope. I was only fourteen at the time, and it was then that Anna Fyodorovna first came to see us. She kept insisting that she

was some sort of landowner and related to us. Mama too said she was related to us, but very distantly. She had never visited us when papa was alive. Now she came to us with tears in her eyes, expressed sympathy for our loss and pitiful circumstances, but added that father had himself to blame: he had lived beyond his means, had climbed too high and had been too self-confident.

She said she wanted to be on friendly terms with us, suggested that bygones be bygones. And wept when mother assured her that she had never felt any animosity. Then she led mother to church and ordered Mass for the soul of the dear departed (my father); and so we were reconciled.

After many preliminaries in which she stressed our wretched circumstances, our utter loneliness and helplessness with no prospects ahead, she invited us to share her modest home, as she put it. Mother was thankful, yet for a long time could not make up her mind. But as there was no way out and nothing else that we could do, she finally told Anna Fyodorovna that we gratefully accepted her offer. How well I remember the morning when we moved from Petersburg Storona to Vasilyevsky Island. It was a clear, crisp autumn morn-

ing. My mother was weeping and I too was sad. My heart was heavy with vague forebodings. Those were hard times . . . . . .

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II

Life with Anna Fyodorovna was strange and fearful until we grew accustomed to the house, her property in Sixth Line. There were five living-rooms, three of which were occupied by Anna Fyodorovna and my cousin Sasha, an orphan whom she had adopted. The fourth was given to mother and me and the fifth had been rented by a poor student, a certain Pokrovsky. Anna Fyodorovna was wealthier than could at first be suspected, but the source of her income was as mysterious as her doings. Never at rest, always busy and preoccupied, she would leave the house several times a day. But just what she was busy with was more than I could guess. Her numerous and varied acquaintances kept coming and going. Who they were, God knows—they always came on business and stayed only a minute or so. Mama always called me into the room whenever the doorbell rang and this always made Anna Fyodorovna very angry. She would fume

at mama and say that we were too proud, prouder than we could afford—what business had we to be so proud; and she would carry on in this manner for hours on end. I could not understand the significance of her reproaches then; it is only now that I have realized why mama was so reluctant to move to Anna Fyodorovna's. She was an ill-tempered woman and tormented us constantly. Why she ever invited us to stay, is still a mystery to me. She was rather kind at first, and it was not until long after that she showed her true nature: when she saw that we were perfectly helpless and really had nowhere to go. Later she grew kind to me again, even to the point of familiarity and flattery. But at first I had to suffer no less than my mother. Again and again she reminded us of her benevolence, could seem to talk of nothing else. She introduced us to strangers as poor bereaved relatives whom she had sheltered out of Christian charity. During meals she would jealously watch every mouthful we took, but if we ate too little she made a scene again: we were too dainty, her table was not good enough for us—and had we ever known anything better? She never stopped scolding father, saying that he had tried to be better than others, but

had come to a bad end: he had reduced his family to beggary and if not for a charitable relative, a kind Christian soul, they, who knows, might have been starving in the streets. What did she not say! Listening to her was more revolting than painful. Mother was often reduced to tears and her health kept declining from day to day; she was visibly wasting away. But still we continued to work hard from morning till night, mostly sewing to order. This too displeased Anna Fyodorovna who kept saying that her house was no fashion shop. Still, we had to work to buy our clothes and meet unforeseen expenses. It was essential to have some money of our own. Besides, we were trying to save in the hope of moving elsewhere. But the work consumed what remained of my mother's health; she grew weaker from day to day. Illness was sapping her very life. I felt it all and saw it all as the weeks slipped by, one much like the other. We lived very quietly, as though in the country. Anna Fyodorovna too grew gradually quieter as she realized the power she had gained over us. No one had dreamed of contradicting her anyway. We were separated from her apartment by the corridor, while the neighbouring room belonged to Pokrovsky, as

I have said. In return for tutoring Sasha in French and German, in history and geography—in all the sciences, as Anna Fyodorovna put it, he received free board and lodgings. Sasha, then thirteen years old, was a quick-witted girl, though something of a tomboy. And once, when Anna Fyodorovna observed that it could do me no harm to take lessons too, as my education had been neglected at school, my mother joyfully assented. I joined Sasha and for a year Pokrovsky taught us both.

Our tutor was a poor, a very poor young man. His health had prevented him from attending the regular courses and he was called a student simply out of habit. He lived so quietly that we never heard a sound from his room. And strange-looking he was too: he moved about so awkwardly, bowed so clumsily and spoke in such a queer manner that at first I could hardly keep from laughing. Sasha was always playing tricks on him, especially during the lessons. Unfortunately he was short-tempered: any trifle could set him off. He would shout and complain and often rush from the room before the lesson was over. Then he would sit alone for days, poring over his books. There were very many of them, all

rare and expensive. He earned some money from time to time, as he gave lessons in other places too, and as soon as he received his fees, he would buy more books. As I got to know him better, he turned out to be a kind good man, the best I have ever met. Mama respected him greatly and, later, he came to be my best friend after her. But at first I too played pranks upon him with Sasha, big girl though I was. For hours we would think up new ways to tease and irritate him. He was so absurd when angry and we were so amused (I am ashamed to think of it now). Once, when we actually drove him to tears, I heard him muttering: "What cruel children!" and all of a sudden a change came over me—I felt ashamed and sorry for him. Blushing furiously and almost in tears myself, I begged him not to mind us and to take no offence at our stupid pranks. But he closed the book and left the room without finishing the lesson. All day I was tortured by remorse and could not bear the thought that we children had driven him to tears. Hadn't we expected him to weep? Hadn't we wanted him to weep? And so we, two children, had reminded him, a poor, unhappy man, of his bitter lot. I could not sleep that night, so annoyed was I with myself, so

grieved and remorseful. It is said that remorse relieves the heart. How untrue! And somehow my grief was mingled with conceit as well: I didn't want him to regard me as a child; I was fifteen by then.

From that day my imagination was tormented by a thousand schemes to make Pokrovsky change his opinion of me. But I was shy, very timid and could settle my mind on nothing but vague dreams (and what dreams they were!). All I could do was to discontinue joining Sasha in her pranks; and he ceased being angry with us. But this was too little for my pride.

Now, I must say a few words about the most curious, interesting and pitiful man I have ever known. I speak of him at this point because hitherto I had paid no attention to him and began to do so only when everything connected with him had suddenly become of absorbing interest!

From time to time a little old man came to the house, shabbily dressed, grey-headed, awkward and, in short, very strange. He seemed always ashamed of something—ashamed of himself. This kept him shrinking, fidgeting and cutting such capers that one wondered if he was in his right mind. On arriving, he

would stand outside the glass door afraid to come in. When someone happened to pass—myself or Sasha or one of the kinder servants—he would make various signs beckoning to us. Assured by an answering gesture that there were no strangers in the house and that he was welcome to enter, he would open the door gingerly and, rubbing his hands gleefully, tiptoe to Pokrovsky's room. This was Pokrovsky's father.

I learned his full story later. Once employed somewhere as a clerk, he had shown no ability and had held the most insignificant post. When his first wife, the mother of Pokrovsky, had died, he decided to marry again. With his new wife everything went wrong. She would leave no one alone, kept everyone under her thumb. Young Pokrovsky was a boy of ten at that time. His stepmother had come to hate him bitterly, but fate was on his side. A landowner called Bykov who had known the elder Pokrovsky and had been his benefactor now extended his protection to the boy and sent him to school. He took interest in the boy because he had known his deceased mother, a young woman befriended by Anna Fyodorovna and married off to Pokrovsky. Moved by generosity, Mr. Bykov, Anna Fyodorovna's

close friend, had contributed 5,000 rubles as a dowry. What became of that money is unknown. So much I learned from Anna Fyodorovna. Young Pokrovsky did not care to talk of his family affairs himself. His mother was said to have been very handsome and I think it is strange that she should have made so poor a match. She died young, only four years after her marriage. On finishing school, young Pokrovsky entered the university, and Mr. Bykov, who came to St. Petersburg often, did not withhold his patronage. When the young man was obliged to discontinue his studies because of ill health, Mr. Bykov recommended him to Anna Fyodorovna who gave him board and lodging for tutoring Sasha. Meanwhile, the elder Pokrovsky was so harried by his second wife that he took to the worst of vices and was almost perpetually drunk. His wife beat him, made him stay in the kitchen and reduced him to such a state that he was inured to ill usage and blows and ceased to complain. Though he was not yet really old, his addiction threatened to destroy his reason. The last trace of human decency in him was his devotion to young Pokrovsky who was the image of his mother. Perhaps it was the memory of his kindly first wife which gave rise to the

frantic affection of this broken old man. He could think and speak of nothing but his son. He visited him twice a week because he dared not come more often—even so, young Pokrovsky detested these visits. Of all his faults, his greatest was lack of respect for his father. But then, the old man was the most unpleasant creature in the world at times. Firstly, he was very inquisitive. Secondly, his talk and questions, of the most trivial and senseless kind, interrupted the young man's studies. And, finally, he was not always sober. The son was trying to cure the father of his vicious ways, of his inquisitiveness, and chatter, with the result that his senior came to regard him as an oracle and would not dare so much as to open his mouth without special permission.

The old man never tired of admiring his Petenka (as he called him). He nearly always wore a downcast, timid expression when he came to see him—never knowing how he would be received. He would stand there hesitating and if I happened to appear would question me for a full twenty minutes about his Petenka: how was his health? What kind of mood was he in? Was he busy with something important? And if so, then what? Was he writing or just meditating? When I had suf-

ficiently encouraged and reassured the old man, he would make up his mind and open—but, ah, how gingerly—the door, and thrust his head through the chink. Satisfied that his son was not angry, that he had even nodded, he would slip noiselessly in and remove his coat and hat which was always crumpled, full of holes and with a broken rim. He would hang his things, and with equal caution let himself into a chair, never taking his eyes from his son, as if trying to divine his Petenka's mood. If Petenka were at all out of sorts he would notice it at once, get up murmuring that he had just dropped in for a moment, and that, happening to be passing, he had come only to rest a little while. Then, reaching humbly for his coat and that rag of a hat, he would again gingerly open the door and tiptoe away with a smile meant to conceal his disappointment.

When he was well received, on the other hand, the old man was beside himself with joy. Satisfaction would then shine in every line of his face, in every gesture. If Petenka condescended to speak to him, he would rise in his seat and answer in a subdued, obedient manner, almost with awe, in the most refined, that is, the most ridiculous words. He was no speaker, poor man, and always confused and

blushing, scarcely knowing what to do with his hands, what to do with himself, and always muttering something as if anxious to correct his answers. But if he chanced upon the right answer he would square his shoulders, readjust his waistcoat, tie and frock, and shine with dignity; he would sometimes even make so bold as to rise and stroll over to the bookcase, to reach for a book at random and look at the title. On such rare occasions he was debonair, studiedly cool, as though accustomed to handling the books of his son, as though a kindness from Petenka was a matter of course. But once, I was present to see how frightened he was when his son had ordered him to let the books be. Abashed and confused, he stuffed the book back upside down and then, anxious to correct his mistake, wedged it into place with the wrong end; and all the while smiling and blushing and trying to make it all seem innocent and unimportant.

Anxious to change his father's ways, Pokrovsky would give him twenty-five, fifty or more kopeks, if the old man called upon him three times consecutively in a sober state. Or he would present him with a new pair of boots, a tie or waistcoat which made the old man stalk about as proud as a peacock.

Sometimes he would call upon us, bring Sasha and me gingerbread and apples and talk about Petenka. He would urge us to be attentive at our lessons and insist that Petenka was a good son, an exemplary son, and, what is more, a learned son. Saying this he would wink at us so comically and make such faces that we shrieked with laughter. Mama too was very fond of him. But the old man hated Anna Fyodorovna, though he was as quiet as a mouse and humbler than dust in her presence.

My lessons with Pokrovsky were drawing to an end. He still regarded me as a child, a raw schoolgirl like Sasha. This hurt because I had been trying to make up for my former lapses, but he would take no notice, and this annoyed me all the more. I hardly ever talked to him outside of lessons—I could barely do so even when I had the opportunity. I would blush and grow tongue-tied, and then weep with anger in some corner. Who knows how it would have ended if not for a curious incident. When mother was in Anna Fyodorovna's room one evening, I stole into his room; I knew that he was away. What made me do it I cannot say. I had never been to his room before, though we had been neighbours for more than a year. My heart was thumping madly. First

I looked around with alarm and curiosity. It was a poorly furnished room and badly kept. Five rows of books ran along the wall. The chairs and table were piled with papers. Books and papers everywhere! And a queer thought came to me then, disturbing and annoying. Why should he care for my friendship and affection? He was a learned man and I so stupid—I knew nothing and had read nothing, not a single book. I stood looking enviously at those shelves stuffed with books. Hurt, annoyed, and almost angry, I decided to read them all and at once, from the first to the last and as quickly as possible. Probably, my idea was that, having learned what he knew, I should be more worthy of his friendship. Hurriedly I snatched a dusty old volume at random, clasped it to my breast and rushed away, trembling with fear and excitement, blushing and paling by turn. I had meant to read it by the night lamp, when my mother would be asleep. But how disappointed I was when I opened it in my room and found that it was only an old battered and worm-eaten treatise in Latin. Losing no time, I returned and was just about to put it back on the shelf when there was a noise and footsteps in the corridor. I fumbled des-

perately with the wretched thing; it had been so firmly wedged in place, that now, when it had been removed, its neighbours had closed the space. I could not jam it back! I was pushing as hard as I could and the rusty nail on which the shelves were hung must have been waiting just for this. Down came the shelves, books and all. Then the door opened and Pokrovsky entered the room.

Here I must remark that he never could bear to have anyone tamper with his books. God help him who would dare even to touch them! Imagine my horror then when all the books, thick and thin and of all sizes and shapes, bumped to the floor and went skipping under the table and chairs and all over the room. I should have liked to run, but it was too late. This is the end, I thought. The end! I was lost! Undone! Caught at a prank of a ten-year-old! Like a silly girl! An awful fool! Pokrovsky was wild with anger. "What next?" he shouted. "Aren't you ashamed of such tomfoolery? When will you grow up?" He knelt to pick up the books. I stooped to help. "Don't bother!" he rasped. "You'd have done better to keep away, when uninvited!" But he had noticed my humble gesture and softened his tone to that of the chiding tutor, the tone of

our recent lessons. "When will you come to your senses at last? Please reflect: you are not a child, not a little girl. You are fifteen." And as though to convince himself, he looked up at me and suddenly reddened. I could not understand—and stood staring. He stood up, approached embarrassed and began to speak incoherently—apologizing for something, perhaps, because he had only now noticed that I had grown up. And at last I understood. Just what I did then, I hardly know, except that I blushed even more hotly than he and, completely flustered, covered my face and rushed from the room.

I did not know what to do with myself for shame. To think that he had found me in his room! For three days I did not dare to look at him and kept blushing till the tears came. The queerest and most confused thoughts came to my mind. The strangest of them was to go to him and make a clean breast of it—to explain it all and convince him that I was not just a silly girl, but had meant well. I had almost made up my mind to do so, but lacked the courage, thank God! I can well imagine how silly I should have looked. Even now I am ashamed to think of it.

My mother fell seriously ill a few days later. She took to her bed and by the third night was in a high fever and delirious. I never left her for a minute, giving her drink and medicine. By the second night I was completely exhausted and hardly awake. Often there were green spots before my eyes and everything seemed to swim round me. I could have dropped off to sleep at any moment, but for the weak moans of mama. Again and again I would start up, but then sleep would steal on as before. It was torture! I don't know, I cannot remember, but in a moment when sleep was contending with wakefulness, a strange dream, a terrible vision invaded my overwrought mind. I woke with a start. The room was dark; only the night candle flickered, throwing strands of light on the wall. Fear, a strange horror crept over me—my imagination was caught in an evil dream, and my heart contracted. I sprang from the chair with a cry of grief, of unbearable pain. The door opened and Pokrovsky came in. I remember that I was in his arms when I recovered. Gently he placed me in a chair, offered me a glass of water and asked question after question. I said something—I don't remember what.

"You are ill," he said as he took my hand. "Very ill! You are feverish, ruining your health. Take a rest. Lie down and go to sleep. I'll call you in two hours. Do lie down, please!" He kept urging without giving me time to protest. I was ready to collapse from weariness; my eyes were so heavy. I nestled into the chair intending to rest for half an hour, but slept until morning when Pokrovsky woke me because it was time for my mother's medicine. On the following night as I sat at the bedside, determined not to fall asleep, Pokrovsky knocked at eleven o'clock. "Won't you be lonely sitting there by yourself?" he asked as I opened the door. "Here is a book. It will help to pass the time." Gratefully I accepted. I can't remember what book it was, or whether I opened it at all, though I did not sleep a wink that night. A strange elation kept me awake. I was restless, unable to sit still, and again and again got up to pace the room. A pleasant warmth glowed within me, satisfaction! I was so pleased with his attention, so proud of his anxiety. All night I sat dreaming and thinking. He did not come again and I knew that he would not. And so I wondered if he would come the night after.

On the following evening, when everyone had gone to rest, Pokrovsky opened his door and stood on the threshold talking to me. I cannot remember a word of what we said to one another, only that I kept blushing, confused and annoyed with myself, that I wished it was over, though I had craved for it, dreamed of it, and rehearsed my questions and answers. On that evening our friendship began. We spent several hours together every night throughout my mother's illness. Gradually I overcame my shyness, though every talk still left me annoyed with myself. But I was secretly pleased to see that he was forgetting his nasty books. Once, the talk turned jestingly upon the upsetting of the shelf. I was in a queer mood and too confiding and sincere at the moment. I was carried away by a strange exultation and confessed that I had wanted to learn, to know something, that I was annoyed to be looked upon as a mere child. I really must have been in a strange mood; I was full of tenderness and there were tears in my eyes. I told him everything—of my friendship for him, that I wished to care for him, to be at one with him, to comfort and soothe him. He looked at me oddly, surprised and embarrassed, and said nothing. All at once I felt

hurt and disappointed. He hadn't understood and might even be laughing at me. I burst into tears like a child, unable to contain a fit of sobbing. He took my hands, kissed and pressed them to his breast, murmuring consolations. He was moved. What he told me I cannot remember—only that I wept and laughed and wept again, that my cheeks burned and I could not say a word for joy. Though agitated, I noticed that he was constrained and uneasy. Perhaps he could not recover from his surprise over my elation, my sudden ardour. Perhaps he was only curious at first, but afterwards he accepted my devotion, my warm words and concern with a sincerity equal to mine, with the same attention and kindness, as a friend, almost like a brother. It was so pleasant, so comforting! There was no need to conceal anything: he could feel this well and drew closer to me day by day.

Was there anything we did not talk about in those sweet and anxious days by the flickering lamp, at my mother's bedside? We spoke of all that came to our minds and escaped our hearts and we were almost happy. Those were joyous days, though sad, and it is both pleasant and painful to remember them. Memories, whether pleasant or sad, are always painful,

or so they are at least to me. But it is a pleasant kind of pain; and when my heart is heavy the memories are as exhilarating and refreshing as the dew of evening must be to a poor flower faint with the heat of noon.

Mother was getting better, but I still sat up at her bedside. Often, Pokrovsky would bring me books. Reading them merely to keep awake, at first, I gradually began to read them with more attention and finally with eagerness. Here there was so much that was new, unsuspected, my heart was flooded with fresh impressions. And the harder they were to grasp, the dearer they were to me, the sweeter to the soul. Crowding into my heart without end, they left me in a maze of wonder. Fortunately, this spiritual invasion could not unbalance me altogether. I was too dreamy for this. When mother grew well our evening vigils came to an end. It was seldom then that we could exchange a few words, trivial perhaps, but full of concealed and peculiar meaning. I was happy, serenely happy for several weeks.

One day, old Pokrovsky came to see us. Talkative as always, he was unusually cheerful, high-spirited and wordy. He laughed and joked and at last disclosed the cause of his

exaltation by informing us that his Petenka's birthday was only a week away, that he was going to visit his son on the occasion, that he intended to wear his new waistcoat and the boots that his wife had promised to buy. In short, the old man was very happy and chattered away without end.

His birthday! I thought of it day and night. I, too, would give him a birthday present to remind him of our friendship. But what should it be? At last I decided to give him some books. I knew that he would have liked to have Pushkin in the latest edition. And so Pushkin it would be. With my sewing I had been able to save some thirty rubles intended for a frock. And so I sent the kitchen servant, old Matryona, to learn the price of the complete set. And, oh dear! The price of the eleven books, including the covers, was at least sixty rubles. Where would I get the money? I thought and thought, but could not make up my mind. I just could not ask my mother. She would have helped me, of course, but in that event everyone in the house would have known of it and the gift would be regarded merely as an expression of gratitude for Pokrovsky's tuition. I wanted the present to be entirely my own. As for the trouble he had taken with me,

I hoped to remain his eternal debtor, to repay him with my friendship alone. At last I found the way.

I knew that the booksellers at Gostiny Dvor sometimes sold second-hand books that were almost new at half the price if only one bargained with them. So I resolved to visit Gostiny Dvor as soon as possible. My opportunity came on the next day: there was something we needed to buy and as my mother was unwell and Anna Fyodorovna had a convenient fit of laziness, the errand fell to me.

I set off with Matryona and very fortunately soon found a handsomely bound set of Pushkin. I began to bargain. The bookseller at first demanded more than the price at the shop. But then, though not without a great deal of trouble and several feints at departing, the dealer came down to ten rubles in silver. What fun it was to bargain! Poor Matryona could not understand why I was so excited or why I needed so many books. But the trouble was that I had only thirty rubles in bank-notes, and the dealer would not let the set go for a kopek less than the sum he had named. But I pleaded and pleaded and at last after I had left and returned several times he relented and reduced the price by another two rubles,

calling upon God to witness that he was doing this only because I was such a sweet young lady, that he would not have lowered the price for anyone else in the world. To think that only two and a half rubles were wanting! I was ready to weep with vexation; but an unforeseen circumstance helped me in my distress.

At another bookstall, not far away, I saw old Pokrovsky surrounded by four or five booksellers who were harrying him to distraction. Each was extolling his own books. And what books they were! Still, he was eager for them all, and more! He was only too bewildered to make his choice. When I approached and asked what he was doing the old man was overjoyed: he was madly fond of me, perhaps no less than of his Petenka. "I am buying books, Varvara Alexeyevna, some books for Petenka. His birthday is coming and he likes books, and so I am buying books." The old man always expressed himself comically and now he was confused and embarrassed as well. No matter what he chose, the price was one, two or three rubles. As for the larger books, he did not ask the price, but only looked at them wistfully, fumbled with the leaves and tenderly put them back. "No, no, that's too

dear," he would murmur, "perhaps those others?" And again he would rummage in the periodicals, song books and almanacs of the cheaper order. "Why should you buy these?" I asked. "They are rubbish." "Oh, no," he replied, "there are nice books here, so nice." The last word he uttered so lingeringly that I thought he was about to cry because the better books were too expensive. I could almost see how a big tear would trickle from his eye on to the red nose. I asked how much money he had. "Oh that," he muttered and produced, poor man, his entire hoard wrapped in a scrap of newspaper. "Now there is a half-ruble, a twenty-kopek piece, and twenty more in copper." I drew him away, to my bookseller. "Here are eleven books which cost thirty two rubles and a half. I have the thirty. Let me have your two rubles fifty and we'll buy the books together and make it a joint gift." He was wild with joy, tumbled his silver and copper into the hands of the bookseller who at once burdened him with our newly bought library. With the books stuffed into his pockets and under his arms, the old man promised faithfully to bring them to me privately on the next day and went home with his prize.

On the following day the old man came to see his son, and after staying for about an hour, as usual, dropped in on us. He seated himself with the most comical and mysterious expression conceivable. Smiling blandly, and gleefully rubbing his hands as the possessor of a secret, he explained that the books had been secretly brought to our rooms and stowed away in the kitchen under Matryona's care. The conversation then turned to the happy event and the old man described in great detail just how we were to present the gift. But the more he talked, the better I could see that there was something on his mind, something that he did not dare and was even afraid to mention. I said nothing, but I saw that the spark of glee, the repressed satisfaction evident in his antics, grimaces and the winkings of his left eye were going from him, that he was growing more and more anxious and uneasy.

"Varvara Alexeyevna," he began at last, timidly and low, "do you know what I think, Varvara Alexeyevna?" He was growing more and more awkward. "It is this way: what if you were to give him ten books, that is, for yourself, as your own gift. And I will bring the eleventh for myself, that is, as my own

gift. In that way, you see, you shall have a present for him, and I shall have a present for him—both of us will have presents, each his own. . . ." He was too mixed up to go on and resignedly expected my verdict. "Why do you not want us to present our gifts together, Zakhar Petrovich?" I asked. "Well, Varvara Alexeyevna, the thing is, in fact. . . ." He was stammering, entangled in his words, and very red.

"The thing is . . ." he began at last, "I indulge a bit now and then, Varvara Alexeyevna, that is, I am always indulging, I'm afraid. In short, I don't behave as I ought—sometimes because one is cold, or there is trouble, or one is just out of sorts, or something has gone wrong, you know . . . and one can't help having a drop more than is good for one. And Petenka doesn't like it, you know. He gets quite angry, scolds and lectures me—and so my gift will show him that I've been mending my ways, so to speak. He will see that I have been saving money for a long time because I never have any unless Petenka gives me some. He knows it . . . and so he'll be so glad that I have spent the money in such a way, that I have saved it all for him alone."

I was sorry for the old man who sat looking at me so anxiously, and quickly made up my mind.

"But Zakhar Petrovich," I said, "give him all the books yourself!" "All? Do you mean all the books?" "Of course!" "As my own gift?" "Yes." "As a present all my own?" "As a present all your own!" He could not seem to grasp it for a long time.

"Well," he muttered dreamily, "that, of course, would be wonderful—it certainly would be splendid. But then, you.... Then what will you do, Varvara Alexeyevna?" "There will be nothing from me, that's all," I said. "Nothing!" he cried almost frightened. "Nothing from you, nothing at all?" Dismayed, he was ready to give up the idea so that I, too, should have a gift for his son. He was a kind soul. I assured him that I should have been glad to give his son something, but did not want to spoil his pleasure. "If your son is pleased," I added, "and you are pleased, then I'll be pleased too and it will be the same as though I had made a present myself." This reassured him. He stayed with us two hours more, but could not keep still for a moment, kept jumping up, talking, laughing, romping with Sasha, kissing me and pinching my arm

when he could, and when she was not looking, making faces at Anna Fyodorovna, who finally turned him out. Never had he been so boisterous before.

When the great day arrived he appeared at the door exactly at eleven o'clock, directly from Mass, in swallow tails carefully mended and, sure enough, in a new waistcoat and new boots. In each hand he carried a parcel of books. We were just having our coffee in Anna Fyodorovna's room (it was Sunday). His first observation was that Pushkin was an excellent poet, but immediately confused, he strayed into the opinion that one ought to behave oneself well, and if one didn't, one would be indulging, and that evil proclivities were the undoing of man. This he emphasized with several examples of fatal abstinence, and argued that for some time past he had been mending his ways and conducting himself in exemplary fashion. He had always been aware of the justice of his son's words and had taken them to heart, but it was only now that he had really changed for the better. In proof of this, he begged his son to accept these books bought with the money he had been saving so long.

Listening to the old man, I could not help laughing and crying in a breath. He knew

how to make up a story when the occasion required. The books were transferred to his son's room and installed on the shelf. Pokrovsky, of course, had guessed the truth at once. The old man was invited to stay for dinner and what a jolly day it was. After dinner we played cards and forfeits; Sasha was wild and I no less than she. Pokrovsky was attentive and tried to speak to me when I was alone, but I just would not let him. It was the happiest day in four years.

But now come the sad and painful memories, the dark days. And that, perhaps, is why my pen is moving slower, unwilling to go on. But that too, perhaps, is why I have so lovingly described all the small details of my happier days. They were so few and were followed by such grief and troubles which will end God knows when.

My misfortunes began with the illness and death of Pokrovsky who took to his bed two months after the events I have just described. In those last two months he worked hard to earn a living. He had no secure position. Until the very last minute, like all consumptives, he clung to the hope that he had long to live. He could have easily obtained the position of a tutor if he had not detested such an occupa-

tion. As for the civil service, it was out of the question because of his poor health. Besides, he would have had to wait for his first salary for a long time. In short, he could see only the darker sides of things; his character gradually grew warped and his health, too, was declining, though he did not notice it. When autumn came he often went out, wearing only a thin coat, to apply and plead for a position, which humiliated him sorely. Repeatedly caught in the rain and wetting his feet, he finally took to his bed never to rise again. He died in mid-autumn, at the end of October.

Throughout his illness I scarcely left his room, watched over him, attended to his needs and often kept awake all night. His mind was wandering most of the time and he would talk of all sorts of things of his books, of the positions he had sought, of me, of his father—of much that I had never known or even guessed before. In the first days of his illness everyone in the house seemed to be watching me strangely, Anna Fyodorovna often shook her head. But I would calmly return their looks and gradually they ceased to pay attention, at least my mother did.

There were times when Pokrovsky recognized me, though seldom. He was mostly delir-

ious. At other times he seemed to be arguing with someone all night in long, vague and indistinct sentences; his hoarse voice in that small room rang strange and hollow as in a vault. And I was afraid. On the last night especially he was in a frenzy, suffering greatly and moaning. Everyone was frightened and Anna Fyodorovna prayed to God to take him soon. The doctor said that the end must come in the morning.

Old Pokrovsky spent the night at the door where a mat was laid for him. He kept entering the room, fearful to look upon. He was broken-hearted, stunned with grief and stupefied. His head shook with fear, he was trembling all over, he kept muttering and debating with himself. I feared for his reason. Succumbing to exhaustion just before dawn he fell into death-like sleep.

Soon after seven o'clock I saw that death was near and woke the father. The dying man was fully conscious and took leave of each of us. Strangely, I could not weep, though my heart was breaking.

But the last moments were the worst. He kept pleading for something with a faltering tongue, but I could not make out the words. It was more than I could bear. For an hour he

was restless, looking at me piteously and trying to say something with a gesture. Then he pleaded again in his hoarse, indistinct voice. Again I could make nothing of it. By turns, I brought everyone to his bedside, gave him some water. But he shook his head sadly. Finally, I realized what he wanted: he was asking me to draw back the curtain to have a last look at the daylight, at the sun and all God's world. I raised the curtain, but the early day outside was as dull and mournful as the failing life. There was no sunshine and the sky was hidden in mist. It was a sad and lowering sky and a fine drizzle was falling on the window-panes and streaking them with cold rivulets, and the gloom seemed deeper. Fingers of light fought with the trembling flame of the icon lamp and the dying man looked at me wistfully and shook his head. In an instant he was gone.

The funeral was arranged by Anna Fyodorovna. A very plain coffin was bought and an ordinary waggon hired. To recompense the outlay, Anna Fyodorovna seized the dead man's books and other belongings. The old man quarrelled bitterly with her, recovered as many of the books as he could, stuffed them into his pockets, into his hat and would not

part with them for three days, carrying them about even in church. In all these days he was quite lost and dazed. He fussed constantly around the coffin, now readjusting the *venchik*,* now lighting or snuffing the candles. His thoughts could not long remain fixed on any subject. Neither mother nor Anna Fyodorovna attended the service in church. Mama was unwell and Anna Fyodorovna was about to go, but again quarrelled with old Pokrovsky and changed her mind. The old man and I alone were present. During the service a sort of panic came over me, a sort of premonition of the future; I could hardly wait till the service was over. At last the coffin was closed, screwed down, placed upon a waggon and carried off. I followed till the end of the street. The driver had set the horse at a trot and the old man was running behind, sobbing breathlessly. He had lost his hat, but did not pause to pick it up. His hair was wet with the rain and the sharp wind lashed his face. He seemed to notice nothing and kept darting from one side of the waggon to the other, the tails of his old coat flapping. Books protruded from

* *Venchik*—a tiara placed on the heads of the deceased in accordance with the custom of the Greek Church.—*Tr.*

all his pockets; he clutched the largest to his breast. The passers-by uncovered their heads and crossed themselves; some of them even stopped to stare at the poor old man. The books kept falling from his pockets into the mud. When stopped and shown, he would snatch them up and run to overtake the waggon. At the corner of the street he was joined by a ragged old beggar woman. When the waggon disappeared, I went home, fell upon my mother's breast, sobbing violently. I kissed her and flung my arms about her as though to preserve my last friend. But death stood over her already.

. . . . . .

June 11

How grateful I am for yesterday's walk to the Islands, Makar Alexeyevich. How lovely they are, how fresh and green! I had not seen trees and grass for such a long time. When I was ill I thought I would never live to see them again; and so imagine how I felt yesterday! Please don't be annoyed because I seemed so sad yesterday. I was really happy and light of heart, but somehow in my happiest moments I am always sad. And if I did cry,

it doesn't matter. I often weep and don't know why. It is simply that the things I feel hurt me so easily; my impressions are always so painful. The pale, cloudless sky, the setting sun and the stillness of the evening—well, I don't know—I was in a state to be easily moved and my heart was heavy and asked for tears. Why am I writing all this? It is all vague even in my heart and on paper it seems meaningless, but perhaps you will understand. Tears and laughter! How good, how kind you are, Makar Alexeyevich. When you were looking at me yesterday, I could see that you were trying to read my eyes, to catch my happiness. Whether it was a bush, a sapling, an alley of trees, or a strip of water that I saw, there you were watching me as proud as though it were all your own estate. All this shows that you have a kind heart, Makar Alexeyevich, and I love you for it. Good-bye, my dear. I am unwell again today. I wetted my feet and caught cold. Fedora, too, is unwell and so both of us are invalids. Don't forget us and come as often as you can.

Your,

V. D.

June 12

My darling Varvara Alexeyevna,

Do you know that I had expected your letter of yesterday to be in verse, no less! Instead, you have written me only one little page. By this I mean to say that though you have written very little, it is very good and very dear. There is nature and all sorts of landscapes and feelings, in short, you have described it all very well. As for me, I have no talent. Nothing will come of it even if I write a dozen pages. I have done it and I know. You say, my darling, that I am kind and harmless and responsive to the merciful goodness of God as manifest in nature and you praise me in many other ways as well. It is all true, my dear, the Gospel truth! I am just as you described. I know it myself. But reading what you write one's heart begins to melt and sad thoughts and feelings come again. Now I shall tell you something of myself, my little one.

When I first came to the office I was seventeen. It was thirty years ago, if a day. And I dare say it is many a service coat I have worn to shreds in that time. But then, I have grown older and wiser too, have seen something of people. I have lived, you may be sure! Why.

there was a time when they nearly recommended me for decoration. You may not believe it but God is my witness. Unfortunately bad people turn up everywhere, my darling. I am an ignoramus and simply stupid, perhaps, but I have a heart just as anybody else. And so, Varenka, do you know what that bad man did to me? I am ashamed to say—you had better ask why he did it. Only because I am timid, because I am quiet, because I am soft-hearted. I was not to his taste, that's why. It began with little things: "Makar Alexeyevich is this, and Makar Alexeyevich is that." Then it came to: "Now what can you expect of Makar Alexeyevich?" And finally: "Who is to blame? Makar Alexeyevich of course!" And so you see, my darling, it was always Makar Alexeyevich's fault. That is all they did: make Makar Alexeyevich a byword in the whole ministry. But this was not enough for them. Soon there were remarks about the boots I wore, about my service coat, my hair and even my figure: it was all wrong and had to be changed. And this has gone on for years, every blessed day, as long as I can remember. I'm used to it by now, I can get used to anything because I'm only a little man, of no account. Yet, why should I put up with it all? What wrong

have I done? Have I snatched another man's promotion out of turn? Whom have I ever denounced to our superiors? Have I ever wrangled for a rise? Have I ever intrigued against anyone? You should be ashamed even to imagine such a thing! What need had I for all that? And just consider, my darling, am I sufficiently gifted to be ambitious and deceitful? God forgive me, but what have I done to deserve all this ... in your eyes I am a worthy man, am I not? And you, my darling, are far better than all the others. And, after all, what is the greatest civic virtue? Yevstafy Ivanovich in a private talk yesterday said that the greatest civic virtue was to make money hand over fist. Yevstafy Ivanovich was joking, of course (I'm sure Yevstafy Ivanovich was joking), but the moral is that one should not be a burden to anyone, and I am a burden to nobody. I have my crust of bread, stale perhaps, but honestly earned and very lawfully consumed. What is a man to do? There is no great feat in the copying of papers, but I'm proud of it still, for I work by the sweat of my brow. And then, what is wrong with copying papers? Is it a sin? "He sits there copying!" "The office rat is copying!" What of it? What's dishonest about that? My writing is very neat

and nice to look at and His Excellency is always pleased—it is I who copy the most important papers for His Excellency. As for style, bother it, I have none: I know it very well; and that's why I have never risen in the service. Even to you, my Varenka, I write as I am writing now, without flourishes or sentiments, but just as the thoughts come to me. I know it very well, but let me ask: what would happen if everybody began composing? Who would do the copying then? Tell me the answer to that, my dear. You can't, my darling? Then I am necessary and let them stop tripping me up with their jibes. Let them even call me an "office rat" if I look like one, but can't they see that this rat is necessary, that this rat is useful, that it is a rat that is appreciated, a rat remunerated? That's the sort of a rat I am! But enough of rats, my dear. I hadn't meant to mention them, it was simply my temper and I forgot. From time to time it is pleasant to give the devil his due. Good-bye, my darling, my kind comforter, my own little dove. I'm sure to come to see you soon, my little angel. Until then don't be lonely. I shall bring a book too. Good-bye, Varenka.

Your sincerest well-wisher,

Makar Devushkin

June 20

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am writing this in a hurry to get my work finished on time. Let me explain: there is the chance of a very good bargain. Fedora says that someone wants to sell a new uniform complete with trousers, vest and cap—quite new and cheap too. Couldn't you buy it? You are better off now, as you yourself admit. Now don't say you haven't got the money! These things are so useful. Just look at yourself, look at the clothes you are wearing. They're so shabby, it's a shame. And you have nothing new whatever. I'm sure of it, though you say you have. God knows what you've done with your new uniform. And so please, please make up your mind. Do it for my sake, to show that you love me.

You have sent me a gift of some linen, but you are just ruining yourself. It is horrible, the way you go spending money. What a spendthrift you are! These things are really unnecessary. I know I am perfectly sure that you love me. There is no need to remind me of it by your gifts, especially when it is so hard for me to accept them. I know what they cost

you. Once and for all, don't ever do it again, I beg of you. You won't, will you?

You have asked me, Makar Alexeyevich, to send the continuation of my notes and want me to finish them. To tell the truth, I can hardly say how I could have written even as much as this. I can't bear to speak of the past or think of it even. I'm afraid to look back. And it is hardest of all to speak of my poor mother who left her daughter in the clutches of monsters. The thought of it still makes my heart bleed. It is all so fresh that I have not been able to come to myself, let alone to regain my peace though a year has passed. But you know all about it.

I have told you what Anna Fyodorovna thinks now. She is accusing me of ingratitude and flatly denies that she had anything to do with Mr. Bykov's actions. She wants me to return and says that I am living on alms and that nothing good can come of it. She says that if I return she will induce Mr. Bykov to make amends and give me a dowry. May God forgive them! I am happier here with you and my kind Fedora who reminds me of my nanny. You are a distant relative, but your name is a protection. As for them, I do not want to know them and will forget them if I can. What

more can they want with me! Fedora says that it is all gossip and that they will leave me alone. God grant that they will.

V.D.

June 21

My darling, my little dove,

I don't know how to begin. How strange it is, my love, that we live here, this way. I have never had such happy days. It is just as though the dear God had blessed me with house and family. Darling! My sweetest infant child! Why waste your dear breath on those poor four blouses that I sent. You needed them, Fedora told me. It has been such happiness to give you something; it is all my own, my very own pleasure. So leave me that happiness, my love, why hurt me, why cross me? My life has grown so full. I live for two, for you and me! Secondly, I am about to make my debut in society: my neighbour Ratazyaev, that same official who gives those literary parties, invited me to tea this evening. We are to have a meeting to read literature. That's the sort we are. There! Good-bye, my dear. I have just jotted this down with no special purpose except to let you know that I am well. Through Theresa you

have let me know, my darling, that you need some coloured silk for embroidery. I shall buy it, my darling, I certainly shall. No later than tomorrow I shall have the delight of gratifying your wish, my own little darling. I even know just where it can be bought. I remain

Your sincere friend,
Makar Devushkin

June 22

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

I am sorry to inform you of something so pitiful, so very very pitiful that happened in our house. Gorshkov's little boy passed away soon after four o'clock this morning. I can't say of what he died: of scarlet fever or something of the sort. I went in to comfort them, of course. They do live poorly and how untidy their room was! And no wonder: they all live in one room separated only by several screens for the sake of decency. The coffin stood ready, a plain thing but neat. They bought it ready made. The boy was nine years old, a promising child they say. It hurt to look at them, Varenka. The mother was not crying, but was so drooping, so wilted. Perhaps they were really

relieved to have a child less to feed. There are two more: a baby and a tiny girl of six or so. It is hard to see the suffering of children, especially if they are your own and you can't help them. The father in an old shiny frock-coat sat on a dilapidated chair. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. Not from grief, perhaps, but habit. There is something the matter with his eyes. He is a queer sort, always blushing when you talk to him, confused and tongue-tied. The little girl, his daughter, stood near the coffin, so grey, poor thing, and thoughtful. I don't like to see a child so lost in thought, Varenka; somehow, it is unpleasant. Her rag doll lay alone on the floor. Fingering her lips she stood there so forgotten—so very very still. Our landlady offered her a sweet and she took it but didn't eat it. This is grief, Varenka, isn't it?

Makar Devushkin

June 25

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I have returned your book, a nasty book, simply disgusting. Wherever did you dig up such a gem? Joking apart, do you really like such books, Makar Alexeyevich? The other day

you promised to send me something to read. We will share it. And now good-bye. I have no time to write more.

V.D.

June 26

Dear Varenka,

To tell the truth I haven't read that book, my darling. I read only a few pages and saw that it was all frivolity just to make people laugh, and I thought that this would really be fun. Who knows, I thought, Varenka will perhaps like it too, and that is why I sent it.

But Ratazyaev—he has promised to lend me something really worth while. You will have plenty to read, my dear. That Ratazyaev is a deep one, a real scholar. He even writes himself. Good gracious, how he writes! He has a facile pen and knows how to throw style into it, that is, into every word, why, even such empty, trivial and vulgar words, as I might use when speaking to Faldoni or Theresa, are full of style when he uses them. I always go to his parties. While we sit there smoking he reads his writings to us, sometimes until five o'clock in the morning. A feast of literature! Exquisite! Just flowers! You can make a bouquet out of every phrase! And he is so kind, too, so con-

siderate and obliging! What am I compared to him? Nothing! He has a reputation! And I? I have none. I just don't exist! And still, he is benevolent to me! He even allows me to copy some things for him! But don't think, my darling, that it is only a scheme, that he is benevolent only to make me copy things! That's nasty gossip, my dear, just slander! I'm doing it because I really want to, for my own pleasure and that exactly is why he is benevolent—to give me pleasure. I am well able to appreciate delicacy when I see it, my darling! He is a good, kind man. Yes, and a marvellous writer!

It's a grand thing, literature, Varenka! Really grand! That's what I learned from them the day before yesterday. A profound thing, too! So edifying and fortifying and all this and a good deal more is to be found in their book! And so well written! Literature is a picture, that is, a picture of a kind, and a mirror; it expresses passion, gives fine criticism, instruction, and is also a record of life. I got it all from them. To put it frankly, darling, I can sit there listening (smoking my pipe like the others, perhaps), but as soon as they begin arguing over all sorts of matters, then I am out of it, Varenka. That's over our heads! I try to look wise, of course. But, really, I'm ashamed

of myself: sitting there all evening like a block of wood, racking my brains for an apt word. But just to spite me it won't come. Not even half of an apt word! And one feels so sorry, Varenka, that one is not quite up to the mark, that, as the proverb says: "There's no fool like an old fool." What do I do with my leisure: I sleep like a log. And what should I do? I should do something refined. I should sit down to write something; this would be useful to me and edifying to others. Of course it would be, darling! Do you know how much they earn for this, may God forgive them? Take Ratazyaev, for one, to write a leaf is nothing to him. He can write as many as five a day. And do you know what he gets for it? Three hundred rubles! So he says. And if it is an amusing story or something that people are curious about, he'll get around five hundred. Let them dare refuse. We'll ask for a thousand next time! None of your nonsense with us, Varvara Alexeyevna! Why, my darling, a mere bit of verse —he has a full copybook of them—costs seven thousand, if a kopek! Just think of it! The price of an estate, of a mansion! He says they have offered five thousand, but he knows better. Didn't I plead with him and argue: for the love of God, take those five thousand and to the devil

with them! It's five thousand rubles in cash! But he is stubborn. "They'll give me seven!" Isn't he shrewd, my darling?

Why waste words? I'll do better to quote *The Italian Passions,* that is what his book is called and you can judge for yourself:

"Vladimir started, for in his veins the lust of passion had welled until it had reached boiling-point.

" 'Countess!' he cried, 'do you know how terrible is this adoration of mine, how infinite this madness? No! My dreams have not deceived me—I love you ecstatically, diabolically, like a madman! All the blood in your husband's body could never quench the furious, surging rapture that is in my soul! No puny obstacle could thwart the all-destroying, infernal flame which is consuming my weary breast! Oh, Zinaida, my Zinaida!'

" 'Vladimir!' she whispered, almost beside herself, as she sank upon his bosom.

" 'Oh, Zinaida!' cried the enraptured Smelsky once more.

"His breath was coming in sharp, broken pants. The lamp of love was burning brightly on the altar of passion, and searing the hearts of the two unfortunate sufferers.

" 'Vladimir!' again she whispered in her intoxication, while her bosom heaved, her cheeks glowed, and her eyes flashed fire.

"Thus was a new and dread union consummated.

. . . . . .

"Half an hour later the aged Count entered his wife's boudoir.

" 'Well, my love?' said he. 'Shouldn't we prepare the samovar for the welcome guest of ours?' And he patted her on the cheek."

Now what do you think of that, Varenka? A little frivolous perhaps? But good just the same. Let's give a man his due. And here is another bit from his story *Yermak and Zuleika.* Imagine, my dear, that the wild and terrible conqueror of Siberia is in love with Zuleika, the daughter of the Siberian Tsar Kuchum. Zuleika is his captive. As you see, it is something fresh from the times of Ivan the Terrible.

" 'You love me, Zuleika? Say again that you love me, you love me!'

" 'I *do* love you, Yermak,' whispered Zuleika.

" 'Then, heaven and earth, I thank you! Heaven and earth, you have made me happy! You have given me all, all that my tortured soul has been seeking ever since I was born! 'Tis for this that you have led me hither, my guid-

ing star—'tis for this that you have conducted me beyond the Girdle of Stone of the Urals! To all the world will I now show my Zuleika, and no man, demon or monster of Hell, shall bid me nay! Oh, if men would but understand the mysterious passions of her tender heart, and see the poem which lurks in each of her little tears! Suffer me to drink of those heavenly drops, O being who art not of this earth!'

"'Yermak,' said Zuleika, 'the world is cruel, and men are unjust. They will drive us from their midst—they will condemn us, my beloved Yermak! A poor maiden who was reared amid the snows in the tents of her fathers will wilt in that false and icy, conventional and haughty high society of yours. They will never understand me, my heart's desire.'

"'Is that so? Then shall the sword of the Cossacks sing and whistle over their heads!' cried Yermak, his eyes aflame."

Imagine how he must have felt, Varenka, when he learned that Zuleika had been stabbed to death. Under cover of night, the blind old Kuchum stole into the tent of Yermak and stabbed his daughter. He knew he was delivering a fatal blow to the man who had robbed him of his throne and sceptre.

" 'I love the flash of my steel against stone!' cried Yermak in the passion of his wrath as he whetted his blade on the enchanted rock. 'I will have his heart's blood, and hack and hack the villain to pieces!' "

Then Yermak, unable to bear the loss of his Zuleika, throws himself into the Irtish and the story is over.

And here is a bit in a comical vein, just to make people laugh:

"Do you know Ivan Prokofyevich Zheltopouz? He is the man who bit Prokofy Ivanovich's leg. Ivan Prokofyevich's character is of the forbidding order, but possesses many rare virtues. Prokofy Ivanovich, on the contrary, is fond of radishes and honey. When Pelagea Antonovna was his friend.... Do you know Pelagea Antonovna? She is the woman who always puts on her petticoat inside out."

What humour, Varenka, what pure humour! We laughed fit to split when he read it aloud to us. That is the kind of man he is, God forgive him. Perhaps it is a bit fanciful and much too frivolous, but then it is all innocent and has nothing in it of free thought and radical ideas. I must say, Varenka, that Ratazyaev is a man of good character and therefore an excel-

lent writer—which is more than can be said of most writers.

And what if—what absurd ideas one gets—what if I wrote something? Imagine that you suddenly saw a book entitled *Poems* by Makar Devushkin. What would you say then, my little angel? How would it strike you, eh? As for me, my darling, I would not dare to show myself on Nevsky Prospect then. How would I feel if everyone were looking at me and saying: "There goes Devushkin, the poet and *littérateur*!" "Devushkin in the flesh!" What would I do with my boots then? In passing I must mention that they are always patched and that the soles sometimes flap off in a most unbecoming way. How horrible if all could see that Devushkin, the poet and *littérateur*, walks about in patched and broken boots. What would the *comtesse-duchesse* say if she saw me? I don't suppose she would notice it at all because a countess doesn't really care about one's boots, especially a clerk's boots. (There are boots and boots, of course.) But my own friends would give me away, and Ratazyaev would be the first. He often visits Countess B., almost every day, he says. They receive him like an old friend and do not stand on ceremony. She is a delightful woman, he says, litera-

ry through and through. What a brilliant fellow that Ratazyaev is!

But enough of this. I have been writing just for the fun of it and your amusement. Good-bye, my darling. It's a good deal of nonsense that I have scratched together here, but that's because I'm in highest spirits today. We all had dinner with Ratazyaev and they (the rascals!) drank wine, too. I oughtn't to write about it. But don't imagine anything wrong about me. It's all talk and nothing else. I'll send the books to you, I'll send them for sure.... There's a book by Paul de Cocque circulating in the house. But that is not a book for you, my darling, on no account! Such pages are not fit for you to see. It is said that he has aroused the virtuous indignation of all the critics in St. Petersburg. I am sending you a pound of sweets—I bought it specially for you. Enjoy them, my darling, and remember me whenever you take one. You must suck the fruit-drops, my dear, and never bite them, or you may spoil your teeth. Do you like candied fruit? Write to me if you do. Well good-bye, Varenka, good-bye! May Christ be with you, my little darling, and I remain

Your truest friend,
Makar Devushkin

June 27

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Fedora says that, if I wish, there are people who will help me and secure me a good post as governess. Shall I consent or not? What do you advise? If I agree I shall no longer be a burden to you; and the post is remunerative too. On the other hand, the idea of entering a strange house somehow appals me. They are landowners of some sort, will ask about my past, and what shall I tell them? Besides, I am rather like a wild creature—afraid of people. I grow used to the places I have lived in long and feel better even if the life is hard. And it is far away and who knows what I shall have to do, perhaps nurse the children. And they seem to be difficult to get on with: they have had two governesses in two years. I entreat you to advise me, Makar Alexeyevich. Shall I go or not? Why don't you ever call upon us? We have seen so little of you these days. Only on Sundays and in church. You too are rather like a wild being, just like myself. And I am almost a relative of yours. You just don't love me, Makar Alexeyevich, and I am so sad alone. Sometimes, especially towards evening, I sit all alone, all alone. Fedora may be away

and I sit and think and think—and remember the old days and what was sad and what was joyful—and it all passes before my eyes, and again I see all the familiar faces (they are almost real) and mama more often than others. And what dreams I have. I feel that my health is gone; I'm so weak. When I got up today I suddenly fainted. I have had a bad cough for some time. I think that I will soon die. And who will care, who will weep for me, who will follow my coffin to the graveyard. And perhaps I shall have to die in a strange house, in a strange place. Good God, how sad life is.

Why do you feed me with sweets all the time, Makar Alexeyevich? I really can't imagine where you find the money? Save your money, my dear friend. Fedora is selling a rug which I embroidered. They are offering us fifty rubles in bank-notes. That is a good price, more than I expected. I shall give three rubles to Fedora and sew a frock for myself, a simple, but warm frock. Also I'll make a waistcoat for you, make it myself and out of good material.

Fedora has brought a book, *The Tales of Ivan Belkin*,* which I am sending to you; read it if you care. But please don't get

* A collection of stories by A. S. Pushkin written in 1830.—*Ed.*

it soiled or keep it too long. It is not mine. Two years ago mother and I read these stories together and it saddened me so to read them alone now. If you have any books, please send them to me—unless they come from Ratazyaev. He will probably offer you his own works if they are printed at all. How can you possibly like them, Makar Alexeyevich? They are such rubbish. Now good-bye, I have chattered too much as it is. I like to chatter sometimes when I'm sad. It is like medicine, because I unburden my mind that way. Good-bye, my friend, good-bye.

Your,
V.D.

June 28

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dove,

Are you not ashamed to hang your head so hopelessly. Come, come, my angel! How could you ever have such thoughts? You're not ill at all, my love, not ill at all! You are blooming, simply blooming! A little pale perhaps, but blooming just the same. What are those dreams and visions of yours? You ought to be ashamed, my little darling. Just snap your fingers at them. How is it that I sleep well, that nothing ever troubles

me? Why look at me! I sleep like a log, am hale and hearty, as strong as a youth—I really am! Come, come, Varenka! Take yourself in hand! I know what is in your little head. Any trifle will set you off dreaming and repining. Don't do it any more, for my sake! As for that post of governess, never! No, no, no! The idea of such a thing! How could you think of it! And the place is far away too. No, my darling, I won't stand for it. With all my might I stand against it! I'll sell my old frock-coat first, and walk about in my shirt-sleeves rather than let you suffer in want. No, Varenka, it is not for you. It is folly, just foolishness! I'm sure it's all Fedora's fault; it is she, stupid woman, who put you in mind of it. Don't trust her, my darling. There may be things about her that you do not know. She is a stupid, nagging gossip. She nagged her late husband to death. Perhaps she has made you angry? No, no, my darling, not for anything in the world! And what will I do, what will be left to me? No, Varenka, no, my darling! Put the thing out of your mind! What, after all, do you lack here? And what joy you give us, Fedora and me! And you are fond of us too. So why not live on, snug and cosy, the way you do? You may read or sew; or just read and not sew—only don't go away.

It won't do at all, your going away! I'll get the books you need and we'll take walks again, but be sensible and think no more of such foolishness. I'll come to see you, and very soon too.

Forgive me for speaking my mind, but I can't help it: it's a disgrace, my darling, a downright disgrace. I'm not a learned man, of course. The schooling I've had was paid for with kopeks, as the saying goes. But it's not of myself, but of Ratazyaev that I want to speak. Forgive me, darling, but I must intercede for him. He is my friend and I can't help it. He writes well, really well, not bad at all in fact. I cannot agree with you in this, I simply cannot. He writes in such a flowery way, so emphatically, with such nice figures of speech and all sorts of ideas. Not bad at all! Perhaps you did not read it with the proper feeling, Varenka? Or you were just in a bad mood—perhaps you were angry with Fedora or something unpleasant has happened? Read it again, Varenka, with the proper feeling and more attentively; and read it when you are merry and content and in a happy mood, for instance, with a fruit-drop in your mouth. I must admit, of course, that there are better writers than Ratazyaev, far better perhaps. They are good, yet Ratazyaev is good too; they write well, but

he does not write badly either. He writes all on his own, does his bit of writing—and good for him! Good-bye, darling, I can't write any more. I am busy today. Now mind, my little bird, don't be troubled any more by gloomy thoughts and may God be with you, while I remain

Your true friend,
Makar Devushkin

P. S. Thanks ever so much for the book, darling. I too will read Pushkin. I'll call upon you later in the day, towards evening.

July 1

My dear friend, Makar Alexeyevich,

I do think there's no life for me among you here. On consideration I find that it is quite wrong to refuse such an advantageous offer. I would at least be earning my daily bread; and I would do my best to deserve the kindness of a strange family. I would even try to change my character if necessary. It would, of course, be hard to live among strangers, to try to please them and have no privacy. But perhaps God will help me. I cannot remain a shy, wild being all my life! Such things have happened to me before. I have not forgot-

ten my days at the boarding-school. I remember the Sundays when I would be romping at home; even when mother scolded me my heart was easy and ever so light. But as evening crept on there came a pang of sorrow: I had to be back at school by nine o'clock, at school where everything was so strange and cold and strict, and the mistresses so morose on Mondays. And I wanted to cry. Somewhere in a corner I would weep secretly—because they might say I was lazy. But it wasn't my lessons that made me weep. And what happened afterwards? In time I grew so used to the school that there, too, I cried when I had to leave and to part with my friends.

And then, it's not right that I should be a burden to you and Fedora. It's a tormenting thought. I am putting things plainly because I'm used to frankness with you. Don't I see how Fedora gets up at the grey of dawn to do her washing all day long? And old bones, as you know, crave rest. Don't I see that you are spending your all on me, your very last kopek? And this, on your poor salary, my friend. You have even written that you are ready to sell the coat off your back to keep me from want. I believe you, my dear, I believe your kind heart. But that's what you say now—when you've had

a windfall, that bonus! But afterwards? You know that I'm constantly ill. I cannot keep working the way you do, though I'd be very glad to. And then there is not always enough work. And what is left to me? To waste away as I look at you, poor things. How can I be of the least use to either of you? Why am I so necessary to you? What good have I done you? I'm attached to you with all my heart. You are very very dear to me—but such is my destiny: I can love, but may not turn my love into good deeds—to repay you for your kindness. Don't keep me any longer. Think it over and tell me your final opinion. Awaiting your answer, I am

Your affectionate,

V.D.

July 1

What nonsense, what fancies, Varenka! No sooner are you alone than all sorts of silliness come into your little head! And you don't like this and you don't like that, and all seems topsyturvy. But once again I say: it's all fads and fancies! Just tell me what more you need, just what do you lack? We're all very fond of each other, content and happy—what more can there be? What shall we find among

strangers? You don't know what strangers are, my dear! You ought to have asked me what they are. I know what they are like, I know it very well. I have tasted of their bread. They are bad, Varenka, more malicious than all your kindness: they'll wear you down with reproachful words and bitter looks. And here, with us you are as warm and cosy as a little bird in a nest. And if you fly away what shall we do, poor people with our hearts stolen? What shall I, an old man, do? You say that you are useless? Useless? How can that be? You are not useless at all! Just consider! For one thing you have so beneficial an influence and . . . for instance, I'm thinking of you right now and it makes me so happy. . . . Sometimes I set all my feelings down in the letters I write to you and then get a detailed answer. . . . I can also buy you nice things to wear—I have even bought you a hat. . . . Or there are things you want me to do. How can you say that you are useless? And what should I do, an old man all alone? What am I good for? Perhaps you did not think of that, Varenka. But you ought to. Just put it this way: what would the old man do without me? I'm used to having you near. And if you're gone, there is only one thing I can do: go to the Neva and put an end

to it all. What else is there to do? Ah Varenka, my darling Varenka, it seems you would like to have me laid on a cart and carried all alone to the Volkovo graveyard where only an old beggar crony will watch them fill my grave with sand and finally go away and leave me there forgotten. It's a sin, my darling, a grievous sin to want such things. I am returning your book, Varenka, and if you want to know my opinion, my little friend, I'll say this: I have never read a better book in all my life. And I keep asking myself, my darling: how could I have been such a bumpkin, may God forgive me! What have I been doing with myself? From what forests have I sprung? Honestly, I do not know a thing, my darling, nothing at all! Plainly, I'll say this, Varenka: I'm an ignorant man. I have read very little, very little indeed, almost nothing: *A Picture of Man,* a very wise book, also *A Boy Who Learned To Play Nice Pieces on the Chimes*, also *Ivick's Storks* and that is all. That's all I've read. And now I have read *The Station-Master** in that book of yours. And so you see, my Varenka, that it can come to pass that one lives a long time and never knows that right at hand there

* One of *The Tales of Ivan Belkin.—Ed.*

lies a book which tells the whole story of your life as simply as a song. What you could not see before grows clear as you read on, and you remember things, and understand things, and guess things. And what else I like about the book is this: other books are sometimes so clever that I read and read and can't understand a thing for the life of me. I'm so dense by nature that the too important books are not for me. But when you read this book, it's just as if you wrote it yourself, as if, in a manner of speaking, it were my own heart——whatever it may be—that lay there for all to read. That's how it is. Really, it's simple enough. I could have written it myself. Why not? I feel it just as it is written in the book. Didn't I have the same experiences as that poor Samson Vyrin.* How many Vyrins, poor devils, are there among us! And didn't he describe it all so cleverly? I almost wept, darling, as I read how he took to drinking, how he drank himself unconscious and lay sleeping all day on that sheepskin, or sat wiping the tears away with the dirty hem of his coat as he thought of his poor stray daughter. That is life. Read it again. It is a living thing. I have seen it myself.

* A character from *The Station-Master.—Ed.*

It's on all sides of me. Take our Theresa for instance, or our poor clerk. Isn't he another Samson Vyrin, though his name is Gorshkov? We're all that way and to each of us this very thing may happen. It may happen even to a count who lives on Nevsky or on the embankment, though it will seem different there with their high tone. But it will be the same, for all that. Yes, anything may happen. Even to me! You see how it is, my darling: how can you think of leaving us? The vice of Vyrin may overwhelm me also and both of us will be undone. So for the love of God, my darling, put those willful thoughts from your mind and torture me no longer. My poor little fledgling, how will you ever be able to feed or defend yourself from harm and evil people? Come, come, Varenka! Pay no heed to bad advice. You will do better to read your book again and more attentively: it will do you good.

I have told Ratazyaev about *The Station-Master*. He insists that it is old-fashioned and that nowadays all good books have pictures and various descriptions. I didn't understand him very well. He conceded that Pushkin was a good writer, that he contributed to the glory of Russia, and said much more in the same vein. Yes, Varenka, it's a good book, a very

good book. You should read it again with attention. Take my advice and make an old man happy by your obedience. God will reward you, my darling. He will surely reward you.

Your faithful friend,
Makar Devushkin

July 6

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Today, Fedora brought me fifteen rubles in silver and she was so pleased when I gave her three rubles, poor thing. I am writing this in a hurry: I'm cutting the pattern of a waistcoat for you—the material is exquisite: yellow and adorned with flowers. I'm sending you another book, a collection of stories. I have read some of them. Read the one entitled *The Service Coat.** You are pressing me to accept your invitation to the theatre. Isn't it too expensive? If we go at all, then buy the tickets for the gallery. I haven't been to the theatre for longer than I can remember. But again, I'm afraid: isn't it too dear? Fedora keeps shaking her head and says that you are living beyond your means. I can see that for myself—how much you have spent on me alone! I'm afraid some-

* A story by N. V. Gogol, written in 1842.—*Ed.*

thing may happen if you go on like this. Fe**dora** has been telling me of some rumours con**cerning** your arguments with the landlady **about** the rent. I fear for you, Makar Alexeye**vich**! Good-bye. I'm in a hurry just now. There is some small matter to which I must at**tend**: I must change the ribbon of my hat.

V.D.

P.S. If we go to the theatre I think I shall wear my new hat and black mantilla. That will be nice, won't it?

July 7

My dearest Varvara Alexeyevna,

To continue our talk of yesterday, let me add, my darling, that once upon a time I too was a thoughtless young man, thoroughly smitten with an actress, but that was not the queerest of all. The thing is that I had practically never seen her but only once in the theatre. And yet I was in love, head over ears. My neighbours at the time were a half dozen boisterous young men with whom I grew friendly almost against my will; I kept decently aloof of their doings. For the sake of company, however, I generally humoured them.

The things they told me about that actress! Every evening, whenever there was a show, the entire band of them would take seats in the gallery—they never had so much as a kopek for the ordinary needs of life—and there they would be, clapping and calling her before the curtain again and again and applauding like mad! And afterwards there could be no question of sleep; they would be talking of their dear Glasha all night: they were all in love with her, all to a man. That canary sang in every heart. They finally wrought up even me, a helpless youth and before I knew it I found myself in the gallery with the others. Only a bit of the curtain was visible from where I sat, but nothing missed my ears. And sure enough the canary had a very sweet voice, a ringing, honeyed, nightingale warble. We shouted ourselves hoarse, clapped our hands sore, attracted general attention until one of us was actually turned out. I came home all in a daze with only one ruble in my pocket and the next salary ten days off. And what do you think, my darling? On the very next day before office hours I spent the remainder of my money on some perfume and scented soap at the French barber's. Why I bought it is more than I can say. I went without dinner that day.

but used the time to moon under her window. She lived on the third floor, in Nevsky Prospect. I would rest at home for an hour after work, and walk beneath her window in Nevsky once more. I kept doing this for a month and a half. At the corner I would sometimes hire a dashing cab and sail by her window in all my glory. I ran into debt, of course, but finally my passion cooled. I got tired of it. This is what an actress can reduce an honest man to, my darling. But then I was young in those days.

M.D.

July 8

My esteemed Varvara Alexeyevna,

I hasten to return the book I received on the sixth of the current month and at the same time avail myself of the opportunity to explain myself. Wasn't it wicked of you, my darling, to have sent me such a book! The Almighty has given every man that place in life which he deserves. Some are destined to wear the epaulettes of generals, others to serve as privy councillors, some to command and others to obey and fear and never murmur. This has all been ordained according to man's capacity. Some are fit for one thing, others for another, and this is ordered by God himself. I have been

working at the office for thirty years now. My service has been irreproachable, behaviour abstemious, and I have never been detected of disorderly conduct. As a citizen I in all consciousness regard myself as a man with shortcomings, but with virtues as well. I am respected by my superiors and even His Excellency is pleased with me. I know he is pleased with me even if he has not shown special marks of favour hitherto. I have lived to turn grey with no grave sins on my conscience. As to the small trespasses, who is not guilty of them? Everyone has trespassed in small things, even you, my darling. But I have never been guilty of misdemeanour or disrespect, of violating the rules or disturbing the peace. No! Never! There was a time when I was even recommended for decoration. But why mention such a thing! In all fairness, you should have known all this and he, the author, should have known it too. If a man has decided to describe everything he should also know everything. I never expected such a thing of you, my dear. You, of all people, Varenka!

Does this mean that a man is not to live peaceably in his little corner, such as it might be, to live, as it were, in still waters, God fearing and offending no one and justly ex-

pecting that others too leave him alone, that they keep to themselves and never poke into his affairs. What right have they to spy on one's privacy? Why should they care whether one has a decent vest or not, whether one has underclothes or not, whether you have a pair of boots or not, whether they are decently soled or not? Why must they know what one eats, what one drinks or what one copies? What if I do tiptoe where the pavement is bad in order to preserve my boots? Why should the author tell his readers that his fellow-man is sometimes in bad straits and has to do without his tea? As though everyone has to have tea! Do I watch every morsel that my neighbours take? Do I? Can anyone say I ever did? Then why do others? This is what I mean, Varvara Alexeyevna: a man may be doing his work with zeal—respected even by his chief (say what you like, it is true)—and all of sudden some scribbler pops up to make a fool of him. He may, of course, get something new sewn for himself once in a while. He may, it is true, be so elated as to lie awake at night. That is just the way I felt, for instance, when I was putting on my new boots. It was sinfully pleasant because it was a delight to see one's feet in such fine leather. Granted that

the author has described this accurately. Still, I'm really surprised that our chief Fyodor Fyodorovich stands for such books. He ought to have been angry about it and defended his character! It is true, he is still a young official and likes to shout at us sometimes like the one in the book. But why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't he haul us over the coals? The small fry should be hauled over the coals once in a while! True, he sometimes does it for the sake of authority. And why shouldn't he? He has to put us in our place, to put the fear of God into us because, between ourselves, Varenka, we small fry are quite worthless without the fear of God and each of us thinks only of staying on the pay sheet: the main thing is to belong, not to work. And as there are different ranks and each of them calls for its own kind of hauling over the coals, the tone used differs according to the different rank. How else should it be? Such is the way of the world, darling. Each of us sets himself up over the others and some haul the others over the coals. Without this precaution there would be an end to the world, an end to order. I am truly astonished that Fyodor Fyodorovich could put up with such impertinence.

What is the good of writing such things?

What is the use of it? Will the reader present me with a new service coat? Or with a new pair of boots? Nothing of the kind, Varenka. He will just read it all and ask for more. One is so careful to hide one's shortcomings, so careful to keep to oneself because of gossip: every molehill may be turned into a mountain —and before you know it, there is the whole of your civic and family life laid brazenly bare in a book, laughed at and bandied about. How can one show oneself in the street after that! Everything has been so exactly described that we will be recognized by the way we walk! It would not have been so bad, perhaps, if the author had come to his senses towards the end of the book and had somehow softened it down a bit by saying, after the description of how they tossed bits of paper over him, something to this effect: for all that, he was a good, virtuous man, did not deserve such treatment at the hands of his comrades, obeyed his superiors (here it is advisable to cite some example), bore no malice, believed in God and died (if the author insists that he should die) mourned by his family and friends. It would have been still better not to let him die, poor fellow, but let him retrieve his service coat, let him be summoned by His Excellency who,

after due inquiries as to his virtues, promotes him in rank and raises his salary—so that virtue is triumphant and vice is duly punished in the persons of his comrades. That is how I should have written it. And what is good about the way he wrote the story? He has just described a trivial episode in our nasty workaday existence. How could you have brought yourself to send me such a book, my darling? It's a pernicious book, Varenka. It is simply untrue because there cannot be such a clerk. I ought to lodge a complaint against such a book, Varenka.

Your obedient servant,
Makar Devushkin

July 27

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

The things that have been happening lately and your last letters have caused me great anxiety and made me wonder, until Fedora explained it all. Why give way to despair and fall into such an abyss, Makar Alexeyevich? Your explanations have not satisfied me. As you now see I should have taken that remunerative post after all. The thing that happened recently has really frightened me. You say that

it was for the love of me that you have been concealing things. I always felt indebted to you though I used to believe that the money you were spending on me were your savings in the bank. What am I to feel now when I have learned that you never had any money at all, that you have been drawing your salary in advance only because you pitied my condition, that you sold your coat when I was ill. What shall I do! My poor Makar Alexeyevich! You should have stopped it all after those first kindnesses bestowed on me out of sympathy and feeling of kinship. You shouldn't have squandered money on luxuries. You are not a real friend: you were not frank with me, Makar Alexeyevich, and now that I know that your last kopeks were spent on clothing, on sweets, theatre tickets, books and amusements I am paying dearly for my unforgivable thoughtlessness. (Didn't I accept everything without thinking of your needs?) And all the things with which you hoped to bring me joy have brought grief and futile regrets. I had noticed your depression of late and had been uneasy too, but the thing that actually happened surpassed my worst fears. Good God! How could you lose your self-possession so completely, Makar Alexeyevich? What will

people say! To think that you, who were so respected for modesty, prudence and kindness, have contracted one of the worst of vices, one for which you had never had any inclination before. What was I to feel when I learned from Fedora that you were found intoxicated in the streets and were brought home by the police? I could hardly believe my ears, though I had expected something out of the ordinary since you had not come to visit me for four days. Had you thought, Makar Alexeyevich, what your chiefs would say if they knew the real cause of your absence?

You write that everybody is laughing at you, that they have learned about our friendship and that your neighbours often mention my name in their jibes. For the love of God, Makar Alexeyevich, pay no attention to them and compose yourself. I'm also worried about that incident you had with the officers. Some rumours have reached me already. Please tell me about it. You wrote that you were afraid to tell the whole truth, afraid you would lose my friendship, that you were in despair because you did not know how to continue to help me and how to keep me out of the hospital, that you had borrowed as much money as you could and had awful quarrels with your land-

lady. You could have done nothing worse than to conceal all this. And anyway I know it now. You have scrupled to make me see that I was the cause of your troubles, but have actually doubled my grief by your conduct. This is crushing, Makar Alexeyevich! Ah, my friend, misfortune is contagious! Those who are poor and unhappy should keep away from one another. I have brought you troubles you have never had before in all your modest and retired existence. The thought is unbearable.

Tell me frankly just what has happened to you and how you came to such a state. Tell me something comforting, if possible. It isn't selfishness that makes me ask for this, but my friendship which nothing can drive from my heart. Good-bye. I am impatient for your answer. It was wrong of you, Makar Alexeyevich, to think of me as you did.

Your affectionate,

Varvara Dobrosyolova

July 28

My priceless child, Varvara Alexeyevna,

Now that it is all done with and over and my life is setting into its usual course, I can

inform you of this: you were worried about what people might think and so I hasten to assure you that my honour is more dear to me than anything in the world. In consequence of which I inform you herewith about my adversities and state that my superiors haven't the faintest idea about it and never will. And so they continue to hold me in respect as of old. Only one thing worries me: the gossipers. The screaming of my landlady has been reduced to a grumble by your ten rubles with which I paid part of my arrears. As for the others, they cause no trouble, no trouble at all as long as I don't try to borrow any more from them. I will conclude my explanations with this statement, my darling: your esteem is more important to me than anything in the world and fully compensates me for all my temporary reverses. Thank God, the first squalls of the storm are over and you do not regard me as a false friend and a selfish person because I could not bear to let you go away and so deceived you, loving you as I did, my darling little angel. I have returned to my work with double zeal and cope with my duties excellently. Yevstafy Ivanovich didn't say a word when I passed him yesterday. I won't conceal, my darling, that I am crushed by my debts and

the state of my wardrobe. But it really does not matter and I beg you not to worry. The fifty-kopek piece you sent me has cut me to the heart. So it has come to this. It is not I, old fool that I am, who is helping you, but you, my poor defenceless orphan, who is helping me. It was nice of Fedora to have got that money. For the time being, my darling, there are no real prospects of getting money. Should any turn up, I shall let you know at once. But gossip—it worries me most of all. Good-bye, my angel. I kiss your little hands and pray that you may get well soon. I cannot write in greater detail because I have to hurry to the office. I must make amends for my negligence. This evening I'll write about the other things that happened and my trouble with those officers.

Your respectful and affectionate friend,

Makar Devushkin

July 28

Ah, Varenka, Varenka!

It is you who ought to be ashamed of yourself now and not I! It will remain on your conscience for ever. Your last letter left me

completely bewildered; but searching my heart I saw that I had been right, perfectly right. I am not referring to that spree of mine of course (enough of that, my darling, enough!) but to the fact that I am fond of you and that it is not at all imprudent to be fond of you, not at all. You know nothing about it, my darling. If you really knew why I can't help being fond of you, you would not say the things you did. It is your head alone that is speaking. I'm sure your heart would tell another story.

To be honest, my darling, I just cannot remember what took place between me and those officers. I must say, my dear, that I had been in embarrassing circumstances. For an entire month I had been hanging in mid-air, by a single thread, so to say; it was a nasty situation. I kept things hidden from you and from my neighbours as well. But my landlady raised a terrible row. I did not care, of course. Let the old witch shout to her heart's content. But first of all it was a disgrace and then, she had learned, God knows how, about our letters and began yelling such things that I had to stop my ears. Unfortunately, the others did not stop but on the contrary pricked up their ears. Even now, my dear, I feel greatly ashamed....

And thus, Varenka, this shower of misfor-

tunes had nearly finished me. On top of it all, Fedora told me that some wretch came up to your dwelling and insulted you with his despicable proposals. How deeply you were hurt by this, my dear, I was able to judge from the pain it caused me. It was then that I lost my head—went off the deep end. I rushed off, Varenka, in an impossible frenzy and made straight for the quarters of that sinful wretch. I did not know just what I was going to do, but could not bear to have you insulted, my little angel. It was so sad and, to make matters worse, it was raining and the streets were so wet and slippery, so sad and depressing. I had almost changed my mind and was about to turn back—and then it was that I fell: I happened to meet Yemelya, that is, Yemelyan Ilyich. He is a clerk, that is, he was a clerk until they discharged him; and what he does for a living now is more than I can say. And so the two of us walked in the same direction. And then—but what pleasure will you find, Varenka, in reading the story of your friend's misfortunes and temptations? On the evening of the third day Yemelya goaded me into calling upon that officer. I learned the address from the janitor. Speaking of that officer, my dear, I had long noticed that there was some-

thing wrong about the fellow; I had watched him when he lived in our house. Now I see that I was guilty of an indiscretion because, to tell the truth, I was not altogether sober when I was ushered in. I can't remember a thing, Varenka, except that the room was full of officers—or perhaps I was seeing double—God knows. I cannot remember just what I said, but I know that I said a good deal in my indignation. Then they turned me out of the room and even threw me down the stairs. They did not exactly throw me down, just pushed me out of the house. You have already learned how I came home and that is all there is to tell. My dignity, of course, was injured, but no one knows about this, that is, no strangers do. Since you are the only person who knows, it is as though it never happened. Isn't that so, Varenka? What I do know for certain is that last year Aksenty Osipovich injured the dignity of Pyotr Petrovich at the office. But it was done secretly, so secretly. He first called him to the janitor's room—I saw it all through a chink in the door—and then settled scores with him there, but in an honourable way—privately. As for me, it didn't matter, since I said nothing about it to anyone. Pyotr Petrovich and Aksenty Osipovich then went on as

if nothing had happened. Pyotr Petrovich was very dignified and kept silent about the matter too. After this they shook hands and bowed to each other. I won't argue, Varenka, I dare not. I have fallen low, very low indeed. And worst of all, I have fallen in my own opinion. That must have been ordained from above. And who shall escape the hand of destiny. So now you have the full story of my misfortunes and adversities, Varenka. They are not really worth reading about. I am not quite well, my darling; I have lost all the gaiety of my disposition. And permit me to assure you of my esteem, love and affection and to remain, my dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

Your obedient servant,
Makar Devushkin

July 29

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I have read both of your letters and am completely bewildered. My poor friend! Either you have withheld a part of your worries or.... Really, Makar Alexeyevich, judging by your letters you have some trouble you do not tell me about. Please come to see us without fail

today. Better yet, come and have dinner with us. You did not even tell me how you manage to live from day to day, how you get on with that landlady of yours. You seem to be silent about it deliberately. Good-bye, my friend, and be sure to come. You would do better to have your dinners with us always. Fedora is a good cook. Good-bye.

Your,
Varvara Dobrosyolova

August 1

Varvara Alexeyevna, my ownest,

You are happy, my dearest, that God has mercifully sent you the opportunity to repay kindness with kindness. I am sure of it, Varenka, because I'm so sure of the goodness of your heart. Only don't chide me—I don't mean to reproach you of course—for having kicked over the traces in my old age. Well, so it was a sin—if you insist. But it hurts me so much to hear it from you, my little friend. Don't be angry with me for saying such things. My heart is so sore. Poor people are cranky. That is the way they are born, I suppose. I have felt this even before. A poor man is always suspi-

cious. He is constantly watching everything and all who pass from the corner of his eye wondering constantly what they are saying of him—perhaps they are saying: "What a poor wretch! What can he be thinking of? What a sorry figure he cuts from this side or that!" And as everyone knows, Varenka, a poor man is worth less than rubbish and can be respected by no one—no matter what the scribblers say —everything will continue as of old. And why? Because they expect a poor man to wear everything inside out, for all to see; to have nothing innermost, nothing that is sacred to him. As to self-respect—not for him! Just the other day Yemelya told me that there had been a subscription for him, but for every ten-kopek piece he received they had to hold an official inspection. They thought they were giving the money away, but actually they were paying for the spectacle of a poor man. Charity is strangely distributed nowadays. Or perhaps it has always been so, who knows. Either they don't know how to go about it or they know it far too well. So that is how it is, my dear. Of other things we may know very little, but of this one thing we know more than is good for us. And why? Because of experience, because we are sure to see some gentleman on his way

to his café saying to himself: "Now I wonder what that shabby clerk will have for dinner today? I'll have *sautée papilliotte* and he will eat porridge without butter most likely." Why should he care what I eat? There really are gentlemen like that, Varenka. They are nasty scribblers constantly watching you to see whether you put your foot down gingerly or not, or whether some poor clerk of such and such a department is down at the heels with his toes sticking out, or whether he is out at the elbows—and then he goes home and writes it all down and gets this trash printed. Now, my dear sir, what business is it of yours if I am out at the elbows? Forgive my indelicacy, Varenka, but a poor man is as much ashamed as a maiden. You would not disrobe—excuse my rudeness—before strangers and similarly a poor man does not like to have anyone poking into his lair, into his family relations. And that is just the trouble! That exactly is why I was so hurt by my enemies who have sullied my good name and self-esteem.

At the office too I have behaved much like a boor, like a mangy sparrow. I burn with shame to think of it. How can I help being ashamed of my elbows peeping through the sleeves or the buttons swinging on their

threads like bells. As ill luck would have it, it was worse today than usual. It was enough to discourage anyone. Even Stepan Karlovich noticed something. Talking of some business matter he suddenly began: "My poor Makar Alexeyevich," and then stopped short. But I guessed the rest and blushed so that even my bald head was flaming. It is nothing, of course, but annoying just the same. Could they have got wind of something? God forbid that they have! To tell the truth, there is a man whom I very strongly suspect. To the scribblers it's nothing. Those scoundrels will sell your private life for a kopek. Nothing is sacred to them.

I know whose handiwork this is. Ratazyaev's and no other's. He is acquainted with someone in our ministry and might tell him all about it, with many embellishments too. Or perhaps he spoke of it in his own ministry and it has seeped over to ours. My neighbours know all about it to the last man. I even saw them pointing at your window. When I went to have dinner with you they all poked their heads out of the windows and the landlady said that the old devil has taken up with an infant and called you bad names. But what is all this compared to Ratazyaev's vicious intention to put us in a

book and describe us in subtle satire. He has said as much and I have been warned by good people. I'm at my wit's end, darling. What should we do? God wishes to punish us, my angel. You promised to send me a book to while away the time. Never mind the book. What's a book, after all? Just a lot of prattle! What's a novel? Stuff and nonsense written for the amusement of idlers! Don't I know it from long experience? And if they talk Shakespeare to you and say: "In literature, you see, there is Shakespeare too," you may be sure it is stuff and nonsense like the rest. It's all nonsense and slander and good only for lampoons.

Your,
Makar Devushkin

August 2

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Do not worry about anything. With God's help all will be well. Fedora has obtained a great deal of work for both of us and we have begun with a will. Perhaps we shall set everything right. She suspects that those latest troubles of mine are somehow connected with Anna Fyodorovna, but what is the difference?

Today I am strangely gay. I've learnt that you intend to borrow money again. God forbid! You'll have endless trouble when the time for repayment comes. Please remember that you are our closest friend, come to see us more often and pay no attention to your landlady. As for the rest of your enemies and ill-wishers, I'm sure that your fears are imaginary, Makar Alexeyevich. I told you that your way of writing was very uneven and it still is. Farewell, until we meet again. I expect you to visit us soon.

Your,

V.D.

August 3

Varvara Alexeyevna, my little angel,

I hasten to tell you, my fondest life, that my hopes are rising. But how can you ask, my little pet, that I should borrow no money? It is quite impossible, my little angel. Here I am, without money, and what if something happens to you, God forbid? You are so delicate. And so I say that it is absolutely necessary to borrow. But to continue:

First let me tell you, Varvara Alexeyevna, that at the office I sit beside Yemelyan Ivano-

vich; not the Yemelyan I told you about. This one is a titular councillor.* He and I are perhaps the oldest employees in the place. He is a kind, unselfish person, but never says anything and looks like a boor. Still, he is very efficient, and his handwriting is unadulterated copperplate! To tell the truth, no worse than mine. He's a worthy man, in short. We have never been really friendly, but only on greeting terms. Naturally, whenever I needed a penknife I would ask him: "Would you kindly lend me a penknife, Yemelyan Ivanovich?" And so on.... But today he suddenly said to me: "A penny for your thoughts, Makar Alexeyevich." I could feel that he wished me well and so told him everything. That is, not everything. I didn't have the courage. But simply that I was in straitened circumstances and all that. "But my dear friend," says Yemelyan Ivanovich, "why don't you borrow some money from Pyotr Petrovich? He lends money on interest. I used to borrow money from him myself. And the interest is reasonable, not extortionate." And how my heart did leap when I heard that, Varenka. Perhaps God will whisper

* One of the lowest ranks in the fourteen-grade system of the bureaucratic hierarchy.—*Ed.*

into Pyotr Petrovich's ear and urge him to lend me that money. I have already been calculating how to pay the landlady and how to help you and buy the things I need myself. As you know, I'm a frightful sight. It makes my flesh creep to sit there like that. Besides, my tormentors are making fun of me, may God forgive them. His Excellency, too, passes our desks sometimes. What if he, may God have mercy on me, should notice how I am dressed. He is so strict about tidiness. He might pass and say nothing, of course, but I would die of the disgrace. That is why I finally had to hide my shame in my ragged pockets and go to Pyotr Petrovich more dead than alive with fear, but full of expectation. And imagine, Varenka, that it should have all come to nothing, nothing at all. Pyotr Petrovich was busy talking to Fedosei Ivanovich when I sidled up and tugged at his sleeve as though to say: "Pyotr Petrovich, eh!" When he turned I explained that it was thirty rubles that I needed, and so on. At first he did not seem to understand me and when I had explained it again he laughed and that was all. I began to explain it all over again until he said: "What security have you?" Then he grew absorbed in his papers and seemed to forget all about me. This put me out

a bit. "No, Pyotr Petrovich," I answered, "I have no security. But I'll return the money as soon as I get my salary. I'll return it to be sure. You may be sure I'll return it." Here someone called him away and I stood waiting, but when he came back he began to trim his pen as though I did not exist. So I went at it again: "Can't it be done somehow, Pyotr Petrovich?" But he didn't seem to hear. I stood and stood there and finally decided to have a last try and tugged at his sleeve again. Do you think he said so much as a word? Nothing of the kind. He finished trimming his pen and began to write. And so I went away.

Perhaps they are all very worthy people, my darling, but so proud, ah so proud, and so very far removed from us, Varenka. Why am I writing all this, my dear? It so happened that Yemelyan Ivanovich laughed just as Pyotr Petrovich did and shook his head, but he encouraged me, the good man. He is a worthy man and promised to recommend me to an acquaintance, an official of the fourteenth class, who lives in Vyborgskaya Street and lends money on interest. Yemelyan Ivanovich says that he is sure to lend me the money. I shall go to see him tomorrow. Shall I? God grant that I get the money: the landlady is driving me from the

house and gives me no dinner. My boots, too, are completely worn and some buttons are missing.... And what is not missing! What if one of our chiefs should get a good look at my disreputable figure. There is no end to our troubles, Varenka, no end!

Makar Devushkin

August 4

Makar Alexeyevich, my kind friend,

Borrow the money as quickly as you can, please! I would never ask for your help under the present circumstances, but if you only knew in what a position we are! We cannot stay in this dwelling any longer. I have had so much trouble and can hardly tell you how agitated I am. This morning an elderly man, almost an old man, wearing decorations, came into the room. I was quite surprised and could not imagine what he wanted. Fedora was out shopping. He asked me how I lived and without waiting for an answer explained that he was the uncle of that officer; that he was very angry with his nephew for the way he had behaved and had caused all the house to talk about us. He said that his nephew was

only a young milksop, a good-for-nothing and that he, the uncle, was ready to give me his protection. He advised me to ignore the young people and added that he sympathized with me like a father, that his feelings were paternal and that he was ready to help me. I stood blushing, not knowing what to say, but in no hurry to thank him. He took my hand against my will, fondled my cheek saying that I was very good-looking, that he was very pleased with my dimples (God knows why) and finally he tried to kiss me, pleading that he was only an old man (and a nasty old man at that). Just then Fedora came. He was a little embarrassed and again assured me that he respected me for my modesty and good sense and hoped that I would not regard him as a stranger. Then he took Fedora aside and tried to offer her money under some strange pretext. Fedora refused, of course. Finally he got ready to go while repeating his assurances and saying that he would come to visit me again and bring me a pair of ear-rings. (He seemed to be embarrassed himself.) He also advised me to move to a better apartment which he had in mind, to one which would cost me nothing. Again he declared that he liked me immensely because I was such an honest and sensible girl

and urged me to beware of the corrupted youth. At last he admitted that he knew Anna Fyodorovna and that she had instructed him to tell me that she would come to visit me in person. Then I realized what it was all about and can hardly tell you how I felt. This was the first time in my life that I found myself in such a position. I lost my temper and roundly told him my opinion of him. Fedora supported me, and we almost turned him out. We are sure that it is Anna Fyodorovna's doing; how else could he have learnt about us?

Now I appeal to you, Makar Alexeyevich. Don't desert me in such a position. Please borrow some money because we have to move. Fedora is of the same opinion. We need at least twenty-five rubles. I'll return the money, I'll earn it, Fedora will find more work for me to do. And so please borrow the money regardless of the interest. I'll return it all, only help me. It is painful to trouble you now when your own circumstances are so bad, but you are my only hope. Good-bye, Makar Alexeyevich. Think of me and with God's help do your best.

V.D.

August 4

My precious darling, Varvara Alexeyevna,

How shaken I am by these unexpected blows! How my spirit quakes under these disasters! This rabble of lickspittles and old ruffians will sap your strength, your life, my angel. Because of them, I shall sink into the grave, I swear I will. I would rather die than not find the money for you now. But if I do, it will be the death of me all the same, Varenka, certain death! Because then you will fly away, like a bird from a nest upon which ferocious owls have descended. It worries me so, my darling. And how could you do this to me, Varenka, how could you? You are suffering, you are hurt and tormented, my little chick and yet you have scrupled to trouble me and assure me so pitifully that you will return the money, that is, that you will be ruining your frail health in order to meet the interest on time. Think well, Varenka, before saying such things. Why should you slave and sew and worry your little head and spoil your sweet eyes and undermine your health? Ah, Varenka, Varenka! I myself know that I am fit for nothing, but I shall force myself to be fit for something, after all. Nothing will deter me. I'll get

extra work. I'll copy papers for the writers, I'll go to them myself and beg them to give me some work. Surely, they need someone who can copy well; I know they do. I just won't permit you to work yourself ill; I won't allow you to carry out your disastrous intentions. I shall certainly borrow the money somehow, my angel. I would rather die than fail. You say that I should not be afraid of the heavy interest. Don't worry, my darling, I am not afraid of anything now. I am going to borrow forty rubles in bank-notes. That is not too much, is it? Can I be trusted with forty rubles? Will they take my word and nothing more? Am I capable of inspiring confidence at first sight? That is, can a first glance at my face make a favourable impression? Just visualize my person, darling, and tell me: can I inspire all this? What do you think of it? I'm very nervous now—it is really painful. Of the forty rubles I shall set aside twenty-five for you, Varenka, two rubles for my landlady and the rest for my own needs. The landlady, of course, ought to receive more. She is entitled to it, in fact. But just consider my needs, Varenka, and you will see that I really cannot give her more. And so, why talk about it, or even mention it? A ruble in silver will be enough for a new pair

of boots. I'm afraid my old boots will not carry me to the office even tomorrow. A neckerchief, too, would be welcome: the one I have is a year old. But then, you promised to cut a neckerchief for me out of your apron, and a dickey too. So there is no need to worry about these. And so I shall have a new pair of boots and a neckerchief. But what shall we do about buttons, my little friend? You will agree, my little Varenka, that I cannot do without buttons. On one side of my jacket they are all gone and I tremble at the thought that His Excellency may notice such untidiness and say—just what he will say, I shall never know, my darling, because I shall be dead before I hear it; I shall simply die on the spot for shame. That will leave me three rubles for my living expenses and for half a pound of tobacco. I cannot do without tobacco, my little one, and it is nine days since I have smoked my pipe. I could buy it and say nothing about it to you, but I would be ashamed to do such a thing. There you are, in a desperate condition, while I indulge in luxuries. I am writing all this, Varenka, to unburden my conscience. I must tell you frankly, my dear, that I am now in straitened circumstances, or rather that it has never been like this before. My landlady can't bear the sight of me: she

has no respect for me at all. There are so many things I need and I am in debt. The clerks at the office have always been unbearable, but now they are even worse. I am so careful to conceal everything from everybody; I try to conceal even myself; I do my best to slip in unnoticed and keep strictly to myself. It is only to you that I have the courage to speak. And what if I fail to get the money? No, no, Varenka, we had better not think of that. Why torture ourselves with such thoughts? I am saying this that you should not worry. But good God, what will become of you then! You won't be able to move and will still be near me, it is true—but then, how shall I ever dare to return to this place? I shall be lost, rot away and perish. I ought to be shaving instead of writing so much. I shall look more presentable perhaps and, as you know, it is the presentable who are trusted, may God help me. I shall say my prayers and start on my way.

M. Devushkin

August 5

My esteemed Makar Alexeyevich,

What is to become of us if you despair! Don't please! We have had trouble enough. I am

sending you thirty kopeks in silver; I cannot send more. Buy only what you need most in order to make shift for tomorrow. Fedora and I have almost nothing; and what we shall do tomorrow I do not know. It is very sad, Makar Alexeyevich, but do not be sad yourself. You have failed, but have at least done what you could. Fedora thinks that we might as well continue to live here, and that even if we moved to another place, they would find us if they wanted to. Still, we must go away. I would write more, but am out of spirits.

What a strange character you have, Makar Alexeyevich. How you do take things to heart. This will always make you the unhappiest of men. I read your letters very attentively and can see that you worry over me far more than yourself. Other people say that you have a kind heart. I should think so! Permit me to give you some friendly advice, Makar Alexeyevich. I am grateful, very grateful for everything you have done for me. I am deeply sensitive about it. Imagine, therefore, how I feel to see that after all your disasters, of which I was the involuntary cause, you continue to share my joys and sorrows, to live for my affection alone. Taking other people's troubles to heart as you do, it is no wonder that you are an un-

happy man. The sight of you alone frightened me when you came to see me after office hours today. You were so pale and terrified, a ghost of yourself. And why? Because you were afraid to tell me that you had failed, afraid to upset me. And how relieved you were when you saw that I was almost ready to laugh. Do not worry and take on so, Makar Alexeyevich. Do be sensible, I beg of you. Everything will turn out well, you will see! Or else your life will be very hard, grieving for other people as you do. Good-bye, my friend. Don't worry over me so, I beg of you.

V. D.

August 5

Varenka, my little dove,

Very well then, my angel, very well! You say that it does not matter so much, even if I failed to get the money. Very well then. I am reassured and almost happy on your account. I am even glad that you will continue to live where you do without forsaking me, an old man. To tell you the truth, I was delighted with your letter, with the way you do credit to my sentiments. And I am not saying this out of pride, but only because I see that you love

me and show every consideration for the feelings of my heart. But why speak of my heart? My heart, after all, is only my heart; but then you have said, my darling, that I should not be faint of heart. Perfectly true, my darling. One should not be faint of heart. And still, my little one, there are boots to think about, boots in which to go to the office tomorrow! That is where the trouble lies. Such broodings can destroy a man, destroy him completely. And it is not on my own account that I am tormenting myself. For my part, I would not care at all: I would be ready to walk about in my shirt-sleeves and barefooted in the bitterest frost. What would it matter to me? I am only a little man, a very ordinary man. But what would people say? What malicious things my enemies would say if they saw me walking about without a coat! That is why one wears a coat, and boots too perhaps. And so you see, Varenka, the boots are necessary to preserve my honour and good name. In torn boots one can lose the one and the other. You may be sure that this is true, my darling. I have learned it from years of experience. And so you had better believe me, an old man who knows what the world and the people in it are like, and never listen to those pen-pushers and scribblers.

But I have not yet told you, my darling, how it all happened today. What I went through and suffered this morning would suffice another for a whole year. This is what happened: I set off in the wee hours of the morning so as to find him at home and not be late at the office. It was raining and there were puddles everywhere. I walked along, huddled in my coat and thinking: "Merciful God, forgive me my sins and answer my prayer, just this once!" Passing a church I crossed myself, and again asked God to forgive me my sins but remembered that it was not right to make terms with Him. And so I went on, lost in thought, seeing nothing and caring nothing for all that arose in my way. The streets were empty and the few who did walk by were preoccupied and anxious like me. And why wouldn't they be—walking in such weather at such an hour. I met a band of ragged workmen and they jostled me, the louts. Suddenly I grew nervous and uneasy. I did not care about the money any more—just another attempt and I would give up! As I reached Voskresensky Bridge the sole of my boot began to flap and it was difficult to go on. And whom should I meet just then if not Yermolayev—he is only a copyist, not even a junior clerk. He stopped short when

he saw me, stiffened to attention, and followed me with his eyes as though expecting a copper coin to drink my health. "Ah!" I thought, "drink my health, would you? Who cares about it now?" Hardly able to drag along, I stopped to rest for a while and then went on. I looked around for something to hang my thoughts on, something diverting, something encouraging; but no, not a single thought occurred to me, and I only splashed into a puddle and got so dirty that I was ashamed to tears. From afar, finally, I saw a yellow wooden house with a gabled attic serving as a second floor. "This," I thought, "is Markov's house, just as Yemelyan Ivanovich described it." (The Markov who lends money on interest.) But I was nervous and, knowing though I did that it was Markov's house, I made sure of it by asking a watchman. "Whose house is this, my friend?" I asked. The answer was unfriendly, a surly watchman's answer: "This is Markov's house, if you want to know." Watchmen are so unfeeling. The watchman did not matter, of course, but still I was left with a bad taste in my mouth. As you know, one thing leads to another and every trifle seems to have a bearing on one's situation. I passed the house three times and found it harder and harder to enter.

"He won't give me the money," I thought. "Never! I am a total stranger, unattractive in appearance and the matter so delicate—but then let the fates decide! I'll do it if only not to reproach myself later; they won't eat me up, after all." And so I gently opened the gate and went in; but then there was some more trouble—a worthless little cur which jumped about barking its head off. It is just such a nasty trifle as this that can drive a man mad, shake his composure and upset all his decisions. I entered the house more dead than alive, and there ran into more trouble. At the very threshold I stumbled over an old woman—I hadn't noticed her in the dusk—who was busy with some jars of milk she was straining. The jars were upset of course. How she shrilled and shrieked at me! "What could you be wanting here!" And so on over and over again! I am writing this, Varenka, because such things always happen to me under these circumstances. It is my fate: I am always blundering into difficulties. The commotion brought the Finnish landlady, a terrible harridan, to the scene. I asked her if Markov lived there and she said that he did not. But looking me over carefully, she must have changed her mind because she inquired what I wanted to see the

man for. I explained that I had been sent by Yemelyan Ivanovich and told her everything. The old hag now called for her daughter, a rather tall barefooted girl. "Call father," she said, "he is upstairs with the tenants." And to me: "Please come in."

The room was comfortable enough; there were pictures on the walls, mostly generals, there were a sofa, a round table and mignonette and balsam pots on the window-sill. Perhaps I had better go while the going is good, I thought. I came near to running away, my darling. I had already decided to return on the morrow; the weather would be better then, with no milk overturned, and the generals on the walls looking less angry. I was just making for the door when he entered. A little grey old man with shifty eyes, in a greasy dressing-gown caught about at the waist with a string. Asked what I wanted of him, I talked of Yemelyan Ivanovich and forty rubles and all that —but did not bother to finish. By his eyes alone I could see that I had failed. "You need the money urgently," he said, "but I haven't any. And what can you give me as security?" I explained that I had no security to offer, but talked again of Yemelyan Ivanovich and again assured him that it was very urgent. "What has

Yemelyan Ivanovich to do with it?" he asked. "I have no money." Of course not, I thought. I had known it all along. Ah, Varenka, if only the earth could have opened and swallowed me then! My legs turned to stone and a chill ran down my spine. I was looking at him and he at me, his eyes saying: "Better go now, my friend!" If this were not a business matter, I should have been quite embarrassed. "What do you need the money for?" (this is actually what he asked, my darling). I began to talk again only for the sake of saying something, but he was no longer listening. "No, I have no money," he said again. "I am sorry." But I kept urging and pleading, promising to return the money in time, even ahead of time and with any interest he might want. Couldn't he let me have even a little of it? At that moment I was thinking of you, my darling, of that half ruble you gave me, of all our troubles and needs. "No," he said again, "don't talk of interest; you must offer something as security. I have no money, and, by God, I am sorry!" By God! Taking God's name in vain, the robber!

I really cannot remember how I left the house, crossed Vyborgskaya Street and Voskresensky Bridge. I was tired and chilled to the bone and reached the office late, at 10 o'clock.

I should have liked to brush my clothing, but the watchman, Snegiryov, would not let me. He was afraid that I might spoil the brush and the brush, after all, belongs to the office. And so you see, my darling, they are ready to wipe their feet on me. It is this that is killing me, Varenka, not the lack of money, but this misery, the smiles, the jokes and insinuations. What if His Excellency should hear of it all by some accident! I have fallen on evil days.

I have reread all your letters today, my darling. How sad it is all. Good-bye, dear. May God bless you!

M. Devushkin

P. S. I had meant to describe my troubles jestingly, Varenka, but it hasn't turned out that way. I wanted to please you. I'll call on you, my darling. I shall surely visit you tomorrow.

August 11

Varvara Alexeyevna, my little dove,

I am lost! We are both hopelessly lost! Everything lies in ruins: my reputation, my honour. I am undone and have brought you to the same, my poor darling. It is I who is the

cause of your undoing. They are persecuting me, reviling and ridiculing me, and my landlady went so far as to curse me; she actually shouted at me, and treated me as so much dirt. And at Ratazyaev's party someone read aloud a rough copy of a letter I had written to you, a letter which had fallen out of my pocket. How they did make fun of us and said all sorts of things; they were simply howling with laughter, the traitors. I entered the room and denounced Ratazyaev as a perfidious friend, a traitor. But he came back at me saying that I was a traitor myself, a past hand of *conquête*. He called me a secretive person and a Mr. Lovelace. And that is why everybody calls me now: Mr. Lovelace. It is horrible, my darling, but they know everything, all there is to know, about you and me. To think that even Faldoni has followed suit! When I asked him to go to the grocery for something, he refused and said he was too busy. "But it's your duty," says I. "No, it is not," says he, "because you don't pay your rent." I could not bear such an insult from a stupid peasant and called him a fool. And what did he answer? That it was a fool who said so! I could not believe that he was sober: "You are drunk, you stupid muzhik!" But he came back with: "Not on your

money! Why, you haven't even enough to buy yourself a drink to come to your senses after the night before! Didn't you try to beg ten kopeks off the lady?" And to all this he added: "A nice sort of a gentleman you are!" That is what we have come to, Varenka. I am ashamed to go on living. I am treated like an outcast, a vagrant without a passport. What misfortune! I am done for, lost beyond redemption.

M. D.

August 13

Misfortune upon misfortune, my esteemed Makar Alexeyevich! I scarcely know what to do. What is to become of you? Of what good can I be to you now? I have injured my hand today with the iron. It slipped from my fingers and burned me. What shall I do now? I cannot work and Fedora has been ill for three days. I am awfully worried. I am sending you thirty kopeks in silver. This is nearly all we have. God knows I should have liked to help you more. It is enough to make one weep. Good-bye, my dear friend. I would be much comforted if you called on me today.

V. D.

August 14

Makar Alexeyevich!

What has come over you? Have you lost all fear of God? You will drive me mad. You ought to be ashamed, you are ruining yourself; just think of your reputation. You, a respectable and dignified man? How could you? What if they heard about it at the office. You would die of shame! Think of your grey hair, don't lose your fear of God! Fedora says she will not help you any more; and I won't either. Do you think that your conduct means nothing to me? You don't know how I suffer on your account. I hardly dare to appear on the stairs with everyone looking at me and saying all kind of things: they say that I have *taken up with a drunkard.* And when they carry you home I hear people say: "They have brought that clerk again!" And I am almost ready to weep for shame. I swear that I shall move away from here. I would rather go to work as a maid, a laundress, but I shall not stay here.

I asked you to come to see me, but you did not. My pleading and my tears mean nothing to you, Makar Alexeyevich! And where did you get the money, I wonder? Take care of yourself, please! You are ruining yourself! And

what for? I have heard that your landlady would not let you into the apartment and that you had to spend the night in the passage. What a disgrace! How awful I felt when I heard of it!

Do come to see us. You will be happy here. We shall read together and remember old times. Fedora will tell us of the holy places she has seen and for God's sake, my dear friend, do not ruin yourself and me. It is for you alone that I am living, that I am staying here. Be an honourable man, firm in adversity and remember that it is not a sin to be poor. And why should you despair so? God is merciful and our troubles will pass. But you must bear up. I am sending you a twenty-kopek coin to buy tobacco or whatever else you may need at the moment, but please don't spend it on evil. Please come to see us. Perhaps you are ashamed to do so as you used to, but you shouldn't be. Abandon your false pride and repent sincerely. Trust in God, who will do everything for the best.

V. D.

August 19

Varvara Alexeyevna, my sweet dear!

I am truly ashamed, my ownest, ready to cover my face with shame. But by the by, my darling, what harm has been done, really? Why not gladden the heart once in a while? I forget that the soles of my shoes are no good any more because, come to think of it, soles are nonsense and will remain ordinary, vulgar and dirty soles, all said and done. And boots, too, are nonsense. If the wise men of Greece could walk about without them, should we fiddle with such unworthy things? Why then should people make fun of me and insult me? Couldn't you find something better to write about, my little darling? And tell Fedora for me that she is an unreasonable wench, a troublesome violent wench and foolish besides, extremely foolish. As for my grey hair, you are mistaken, my darling. I am not as old as you think. Yemelya sends his regards. You write that you were crushed on my behalf, and cried. And I write that I was crushed on your behalf, and wept too. In conclusion, I wish you good health and good cheer. As for me, I am healthy and remain, my little angel,

Your friend,

Makar Devushkin

August 21

My dear and esteemed friend, Varvara Alexeyevna,

I feel guilty, my darling, but what's the use, since I felt no less guilty before my misdeeds than I do now. And yet I fell, for all my consciousness of guilt. My own dear darling, I am not malicious or hard of heart. To hurt you, my child, one must have the heart of a ferocious tiger, and I have only the heart of a lamb and, as you know, am not at all inclined to be ferocious. Consequently, my dearest, it is not I alone who is at fault, nor my heart or mind. Who is at fault is more than I can say: it is so obscure, my dear. You sent me thirty kopeks in silver, and then, twenty kopeks more. And I sat there looking at those poor orphan's coins of yours with an aching heart. You have burned your hand and cannot work and will be starving soon and yet you send me money to buy tobacco. What should I have done? Plunder a poor orphan without scruple? I was so depressed, my darling. That is, I felt at first that I was worthless and not much better than the soles of my boots. And so it seemed to me quite ridiculous to regard myself as something of consequence. On the

contrary, I decided to regard myself as something of no consequence, as something quite unbecoming and even indecent. And as soon as I had lost my self-respect I could not help denying all my virtues and my worthiness. And this inevitably brought about my downfall. It was fate, you know. First, I went out to refresh myself and one thing led to another: nature was so sad and the weather cold and it was raining and there was Yemelya on the way, and he had pawned everything, Varenka. All that he had owned had gone the same way and he hadn't had a bite to eat for two days. Now he wanted to pawn something that couldn't be pawned at all. Really, Varenka, I succumbed more out of kindliness and sympathy for the man than out of my own desire. That is how I came to sin. How we wept, the two of us, and remembered you. He is a good soul, Yemelya, tender, and kind to the core.

And I feel all this myself and that is why such things happen to me—because I feel. I know how indebted to you I am, my darling. When I came to know you, I came to know myself better and to love you. And before that, my angel, I was so alone in the world and slept rather than lived. In those days, the vil-

lains used to say that even my figure was all wrong and were so contemptuous of me that I finally grew contemptuous of myself. They used to say that I was a fool and I came to think so too. But when you appeared to me like a vision from above, you brought light into that dark existence of mine, brought light into my heart and soul and there was peace at last and I knew that I was no worse than others. The polish was missing perhaps, and the tone and brilliance too, but I was a man at heart and in mind. But now I felt that I was a waif, a castaway and I no longer valued my own dignity, and oppressed by the weight of misfortune, I lost heart. Now that I have told you all, I beg of you with tears in my eyes never to mention the matter again, for I am sad and weary and my heart is breaking.

With all respect, my darling, I remain

Your constant friend,
Makar Devushkin

September 3

I did not finish my last letter, Makar Alexeyevich. It was too difficult to write. There are moments when I would be glad to be alone,

to be alone and sad without measure; and this mood comes over me more and more often. There is something about memories that one cannot explain, something that carries me irresistibly away so that I may be oblivious to everything for hours. There is scarcely an impression now, sad or pleasant, but reminds me of something similar in the past, and most of all in my golden childhood. But after such moments I am always depressed. I grow weak; my dreaminess exhausts me and my health is growing worse as it is.

But today we have had one of those crisp, refreshing mornings, so rare in autumn, and I am stronger and happy. And so the autumn has come. How I used to love the autumn in the country. I was a child then, but how keenly I felt things. I liked the evenings of autumn better than the mornings. There was a lake beyond the hill, a short distance from the house—I can almost see it now. It was broad and bright, a great sheet of crystal. And if the evening was quiet, it lay so very still with not a murmur in the overhanging trees. The air would be so cool and bracing. The dew would settle on the grass, lights would appear in the windows beneath the thatched roofs, and the herds would be returning home. That was

when I loved to slip away to my lake, forgetful of everything, to watch the rays running on the water from the fires lit by the fishermen on the shore, and at the cool blue of the sky touched with fading red until the moon rose; and the limpid air would carry all sound like a silver bell: the wing of a bird, the slightest whisper of the rushes or the splash of a fish. And then the mists would rise, so thin and transparent over the darkening surface, and in the distance all things would grow vague and disappear. But close at hand everything lay clear, as if carved: the boats, the water's edge, the islets; or a barrel forgotten in the water, or a twig of yellow broom caught in the rushes. A belated gull would dive into the cold depths and flurry off again. I would stand there looking and listening and feeling wonderfully strange. I was a child then.

Yes, I loved the autumn, especially the late autumn when the harvest had been taken in and all the work done, and the villagers gathered in one cottage or another to talk and sing and wait for the winter. Then everything would grow gloomier under the lowering sky, and yellow leaves lay thick at the edges of the naked forest, turning constantly darker and more blue, especially towards evening when

the fogs would settle and the trees loom in the depths like giants, like huge ghosts. There were times when I happened to be out of doors too late or fall behind the others during a walk—and suddenly I would know that I was alone, and I hurried home stricken with panic. Trembling like a leaf I would expect some fearful face to stare at me from the hollow of a tree; and then the wind would suddenly dash through the forest and roar and moan as it swept the remaining leaves from the bare boughs and sent them whirling. And then the birds would follow in vast and noisy flocks darkening the sky and I would be filled with an unaccountable dread and seem to hear a whispering voice: "Run, my child, run away! Soon it will be terrible here. Run!" And I would run until I had lost my breath. Home at last I would find everything so cheerful and warm; we, the children, would be set to shelling peas or poppy-heads while the damp wood crackled in the stove, and mother looked on and our old nurse Ulyana told us of bygone days or tales about magicians and vampires. We would press closer to one another, but smile as we listened. And then there would be a hush. Hadn't someone knocked on the door? But no, it was only old Frolovna's spinning

wheel; and what shouts of laughter would arise. But at night we could not sleep for fear of dreams. I would start up at midnight afraid to stir and lie awake till dawn. And yet I would be up in the morning as fresh as a flower. I would be looking out of the windows and see that the fields had already been clutched by the cold and that the thin hoarfrost of autumn was clinging to the naked boughs. The pond would then be covered with thin ice gleaming under the haze and the birds would be darting about with cheerful cries. But the thin crust over the lake would melt easily under the warm rays of the sun. It was a bright world, vivid and happy. And the stoves would be roaring again as we sat about the samovar and our black dog Polkan, still shaking with the cold of night, would be looking in at the window and wagging his tail so hopefully. A peasant cart would rumble by on its way to the forest for firewood. And we were all so content and so gay in those happy days.

These memories make me weep. The past stands out so bright and the present is so dreary and dark. How will it end, dear God! Do you know, I have the feeling that I will die this autumn; I am sure of it. I am very, very ill. I often think about it and do not want

to die here, to be buried in this earth. Perhaps I will take to my bed again, as I did last spring. You know that I never really recovered. Now, too, I feel very ill. Fedora has been gone all day and I am quite alone. There are times when I am afraid to be alone and have the queer feeling that there is someone else in the room, someone who is speaking to me, especially when I'm startled from my reveries. That is why I have written such a long letter. The fear passes when I write. Good-bye. I must finish now because there is no more paper; and, besides, I have no time. Only one ruble in silver has remained of the money I received for my dress and hat. I am glad that you have given your landlady two rubles in silver; this ought to keep her quiet for a time.

Try to have your clothing put in order. Good-bye, my friend. I am so weak and tire so easily. The slightest effort exhausts me. How shall I be able to work—even if work is to be had. The thought of it alone kills all hope.

V. D.

September 5

Varenka dear,

I have had so many impressions today. To begin with, I have had a headache. To clear it away, I took a walk along the Fontanka. The evening was damp and it was dark—it gets dark soon after five, you know. There was no rain, but the fog was worse than any shower. Huge ragged clouds skudded across the sky. And there were people hurrying along the embankment and, strange as it was, all of them with faces that were terrible and so depressing. There were drunken peasants, snub-nosed and bare-headed, Finnish women in top-boots, workmen, cabmen, clerks of our sort, a thin consumptive apprentice in a striped smock with his face black with grease and a huge lock in his hands, and a discharged soldier, incredibly tall. It must have been the time of the day for such people to appear. And the canal itself was worth looking at. How could so many barges find room there! On the bridges sat women selling damp honey cakes and rotting apples, a lot of bedraggled, dirty women. The Fontanka is a dismal place to take a walk in. There is only wet stone underfoot and tall, smoky houses. There was mist

on all sides and mist overhead. What a sad, dark evening it was.

When I turned into Gorokhovaya it was quite dark and they had started to light the gas lamps. I hadn't been on this street for a long time and it seemed very lively. There were the beautiful shops, large and small, and all sparkling and glittering with rich materials and flowers and ribboned hats. One might think it was all arranged for beauty alone. To think that there are people who buy such things for their wives; it is a wealthy street! Many of the German bakers live here too and they must be rich. There are so many carriages; how the pavement can carry them all? And what luxurious vehicles they are, with their shining windows, their silk and velvet, and lackeys with swords and epaulettes. I looked into each of them as they passed, and wondered if the lady inside was a countess or a princess. It must have been the time of the day when everybody goes to balls and evening parties. It would be interesting to have a closer look at a countess or any great lady. It would be a great pleasure, I am sure. I have never had the opportunity to do so unless peeping into the carriages as now. I thought of you too and how it pained me, my

poor dear darling. Why is it that you are so unhappy, Varenka? My dearest little angel, in what way are you worse than the others? You are so kind, beautiful and learned. Why should your lot in life be so hard? Why should a good man live in need and neglect, while happiness comes to the others uninvited? Of course, my darling, I know that I should not have such thoughts because it savours of free thought. But in all fairness, why is it that fate should smile upon one while he is still in the womb and croak at another only because he was born an orphan. As in fairy-tales, it sometimes does happen that happiness falls to Ivanushka the Fool. In that case he may rummage in the coffers of his inheritance and drink and make merry, while another poor wretch can only lick his lips and watch—that is all he is good for, all that he was born for. It is sinful, of course, to think this way, but then there are some sins which steal into the heart before one knows it. Why couldn't you be riding about in one of those carriages, my darling own, with generals, not our small fry, eager for your sweet smile? You would be wearing gold and silver then, and not poor, worn frocks of linen. And would you be as wan and frail as you are now? Nothing of the

sort! You would be like a little ginger doll, so sweet, so fresh and plump. To peep into your blazing windows to see your shadow and to know that you are happy and joyous; ah, how delightful that would be, my darling little bird! But how are things in real life? Grief, you have been brought to grief by evil people, and to add insult to injury, you are pestered by that bewhiskered piece of trash. Just because he struts about in a frock-coat and can ogle you through a gold lorgnette, that coxcomb imagines that he can take liberties and that one must listen to his impertinence. Must one really? Why so? Because you are a helpless orphan without strong friends to protect you. What sort of a man is it who can offend a helpless little girl? A piece of trash and not a man! A man in semblance only! I'm sure of it. Why, the organ-grinder I met in Gorokhovaya Street is a better man than he. What if he does waste away in the street all day in the hope of an extra kopek? He is his own master and earns his own bread. He is not a beggar, but grinds away for people's pleasure. Here! Enjoy yourselves, that is what I am for! Perhaps he is a beggar, after all, a real beggar, but an honourable beggar for all that. Though tired and hungry, he keeps working

in his own way, but working just the same. There are many, my darling own, who do humble work and earn very little, but will bow to no one and ask for nothing. I am exactly like that organ-grinder, that is, not exactly like him, not even at all like him, but exactly like him only in the decent, honourable sense. I work as hard as I can. What more can I do?

What made me think of the organ-grinder was that today I felt my poverty more keenly than ever. I stopped in the street to watch him play. I did this to distract myself, to keep away unpleasant thoughts. Some cabmen, a young woman and a little unkempt girl stood watching too. The organ-grinder had taken up a stand under someone's windows. Next, I saw a little boy of about ten who would have been good-looking if he were not so pinched and sickly. Almost barefooted and only in a shirt, he stood gaping and listening—boys will be boys! He could not take his eyes off the dancing doll on the barrel organ though his knees were shivering with cold and he kept sucking the sleeve of his shirt. I noticed, too, that he held a scrap of paper. Finally, some gentleman dropped a coin into the box on which the toy Frenchman and his ladies were dancing. The clink of the falling coin startled

the boy and he looked timidly around. He must have thought that I had dropped the coin because he ran up to me and handed me the paper with trembling fingers and in a piping voice begged me to read it. I unfolded it—it was the usual thing, of course; the usual thing about a dying mother with three starving children with an appeal to the dear kind people for help, and a promise that when the mother died, she would intercede for them on high. There was nothing hard to understand there, but what was I to give him? Nothing at all. But how sorry I was! Such a poor little boy, blue with cold! And hungry, too, I'm sure. He was not lying to me. No, no, he could not be. I know it well. But the nasty thing about it is that there are wicked mothers who will send their children out into the cold half-dressed. Perhaps she has simply lost heart; there is no one to help her and so she sits there doing nothing; perhaps she is really ill. Still, she ought to appeal to the proper authorities. But then, she may be simply imposing on the public by sending her weak, hungry little boy out to beg. And what sort of an upbringing will he get with those scraps of paper? There he is running about and pleading, but people have no time for him. Their hearts are like stone

and their words cruel: "Run away, you rascal! None of your mischief!" The boy will grow callous as he trembles with the cold, a frightened little fledgling fallen from the nest. His hands are numb and he can hardly breathe in that chilling air. Before he knows it, he begins to cough and disease creeps into his breast like a slimy reptile. And then death stands over him, waiting in some dark and dingy corner because there is no one to care for him, no one to help him. And there is an end to his little life. That is all there is to some lives, Varenka. It is not easy to hear someone say, "help me for the love of Christ," and then pass by without giving and merely say, "God will help you." There are times, of course, when the words, "For the love of Christ," are not so terrible (there are different kinds of "For the love of Christ," my darling own). Some are whined mechanically in the way that beggars always do. To give such a one nothing is not nearly so tormenting. He is a one who is hardened to it. He is the sort who will pull through somehow. But at other times, the "For the love of Christ," sounds strange, hoarse and terrifying. Just as it sounded today when I was reading the boy's note and someone, right near the fence—he had been just stand-

ing there and not begging of others—said to me: "Spare me a coin, sir, for the love of Christ." The voice was so hoarse that I was startled. But what could I give him? I had nothing. And to think that some rich people are annoyed when the poor complain of their hard lot and say that they are a nuisance and so impudent! Do the moans of the hungry keep them from sleeping at night?

To tell you the truth, my darling own, I have written all this partly to relieve my heart and partly to give you an example of my good style in writing. As you see, my dear, my style has been taking shape of late. And just now I am so despondent that I cannot help sympathizing with my own thoughts; and though I know, my darling, that such sympathy will lead me nowhere, yet it is pleasant to do oneself a bit of justice. All the more so that one is usually inclined to humble oneself, to make less than nothing of oneself and class oneself even lower than a shaving of wood. To give you a comparison, I may tell you that it is all because I am just as harassed and crushed as that little boy who asked me for alms. Forgive me, Varenka, for indulging in a little allegory: as I go to the office early in the morning, I sometimes happen to look about

the city, at all the smoke, the seething and the rumbling which makes me feel so small, as if someone had snapped his fingers under my prying nose. When that happens I shrink and go on as inoffensively as a mouse. But now, my darling, let us have a closer look and see what is happening in those big dark drab houses. Look and then consider whether it is just to put oneself so low and be embarrassed on that account. Mind, Varenka, that I have been saying all this allegorically, not in the direct sense. Now what shall we see in those houses? We shall see how in some dingy corner of some dank hall, called an apartment, a workman wakes up. It is possible that all through the night he has been dreaming about a pair of shoes which he spoiled the day before. To think that a man should dream of such trash. He is a workman, of course, a cobbler and may be excused for thinking constantly of such matters. His children are whimpering and his wife is hungry. And it is not only cobblers who get up with such things on their minds, my darling. It would not matter, of course and perhaps the whole thing would not be worth mentioning if not for another circumstance, namely, that in the same house, on the floor above there is a very rich man who

has also been dreaming in his gilded chamber throughout the night about shoes, that is, not exactly the same shoes, but of shoes nevertheless, and in this sense, my darling, we are all cobblers to a certain degree. And again, it would not matter, but the trouble is that there is no one to whisper into the very rich man's ear that he should stop thinking of and living for himself alone, he is not a cobbler and his children are healthy, and his wife is not hungry; why shouldn't he look around and see if he cannot find something nobler to concern himself with than his shoes. This is what I had meant to tell you allegorically. This may be an awfully free thought, Varenka, but it sometimes does occur to me and when it does, it gushes from my heart in words. And so there is no need at all to humble oneself and be afraid of all that seething and rumbling. In conclusion I will say this, my darling: you may think that I am only gossiping or that I am just in a bad mood or that I have copied it all out of some book. No, my dear, let me reassure you; there is nothing I scorn so much as gossip and I am not in a bad mood and I haven't copied anything. So there!

I came home in a melancholy mood, put the kettle on the stove and was preparing to have

a cup of tea; and suddenly Gorshkov, my poor neighbour, came in. In the morning I had noticed that he wanted to sidle up to me and the other tenants. In passing, I mention, my darling, that his life is incomparably worse than mine—and how could it be otherwise—with his wife, children and all. If I were Gorshkov I would really not know what to do. And so, Gorshkov now entered the room and bowed with his eyes streaming as always and stood there scraping and unable to say a word. I offered him a chair, a broken one, because I have no other, and some tea. For a long time he kept apologizing, but finally accepted the glass of tea. But he declined the sugar and began again to apologize. When I urged him to take the sugar, he argued for a long time and then fished out the tiniest bit and assured me that the tea was astonishingly sweet. Ekh, how humble poverty can make a man! "How are you getting on, my friend?" I asked. "Thank you," he said and went on: "Couldn't you, Makar Alexeyevich, show me the charity of God and help an unfortunate family. My wife and children, you know. They have nothing to eat. With me, the father, looking on, helpless." I was about to say something, but he interrupted again: "I am afraid of every lodger here,

Makar Alexeyevich, that is, not so much afraid as ashamed to speak to them. They are so exclusive, so distant. I would never think of troubling you, my friend and benefactor. I know that you have troubles of your own, that you cannot help me much, but please do lend me something. It was not easy to come to you for this, but I know what a kind heart you have, that you are in need like myself and more likely to feel for me in my misfortune." To this he added many apologies for his audacity and breach of propriety. I said that, glad though I should have been to help him, I had nothing, absolutely nothing. "Makar Alexeyevich, my kind friend," he pleaded again, "I do not ask for much, but this is how things are (and here he turned red): my wife and children, you know. They are starving. Couldn't you spare just ten kopeks?" This made me feel so bad. Yes, the man was worse off than me. All I had at the moment was twenty kopeks; and I had been counting on this for pressing needs tomorrow. "No," I said, "I really could not." I explained why. "But, my dear Makar Alexeyevich, say what you like, do what you like, but give me at least ten kopeks!" I took my twenty-kopek piece and gave it to him. And twenty kopeks, too, is charity, isn't it,

Varenka? What poverty! We began to talk and I finally asked how it had come about that though he was in such straits he had rented a room at five rubles. He explained that he had moved in six months before and had paid three months' rent in advance. But things then came to such a pass that now he did not know what to do. He had hoped that his unfortunate case would be settled by then. He is suing a merchant who defrauded the treasury. When the matter was discovered the rascal was tried and then embroiled Gorshkov. Now the truth is that Gorshkov is guilty only of oversight, of culpable neglect of the state's interests. The case has been going on for years, but Gorshkov keeps running into new obstacles. "Of the dishonour heaped upon me, I am innocent," says Gorshkov, "innocent as can be! Of fraud and theft I am innocent!" But the case has cost him his reputation. He was dismissed and though not actually found guilty, was not entirely cleared. If he had been fully acquitted, that merchant would have had to pay him a handsome sum of money, his by right. I am ready to take Gorshkov's word, but the court will not. It is a tangled affair, so twisted that a hundred years will not be enough to unravel it. No sooner do they unrav-

el one of the knots than the merchant thinks up another. I am sorry for Gorshkov and sympathize with him deeply. He has no work. No one will employ him because of his reputation. Everything that he owned has long been sold. The case drags on and in the meantime a child was born, quite at the wrong time. All this, of course, costs money. When the child was ill, it cost money again; and when it died, still more money was needed. His wife is ill and he too has an old ailment. In short, he has suffered. He claims, however, that there may be a favourable decision in a few days, that there can be no doubt about it. I'm so sorry for him, Varenka. I tried to comfort him as well as I could. He is a lost little man, so much in need of protection; and I comforted him as well as I could. Good-bye, my darling. May Christ be with you and keep you in good health. Varenka, my own darling! Thinking of you is balm for the soul, and suffering for you, a relief.

Your true friend,
Makar Devushkin

September 9

Varvara Alexeyevna, my darling,

I am nearly out of my mind: a fearful thing has happened. My head is whirling and everything around me is whirling too. You will never guess what I have to tell. We have never imagined such a thing. But yes! I have imagined it, felt it in my heart! I even had a dream something like it the other day.

This is what happened. I'll describe it to you without any style, just as it comes to my pen. This morning I went to the office as usual, took my place at the desk and began to write. Here I must mention, my darling, that I did exactly the same yesterday when Timofei Ivanovich approached me in person and said that he had a paper to be copied immediately. "Please copy it as neatly and quickly as possible," he said, "it is to be signed by His Excellency today." I must mention, my darling, that yesterday I was not altogether myself. I was so sad and lonely; my heart was gloomy and chill. I was so worried about you, my darling. I got down to work and copied the document accurately and well. But then, perhaps it was the devil's doing or it was preordained from above or simply that it was just

bound to happen that way: I missed a line. And God knows how it changed the sense, if sense there was left at all. They were late with that paper yesterday and His Excellency signed it only today. I came to the office, suspecting nothing and took my place next to Yemelyan Ivanovich. Here I must mention, too, my darling own, that for some time I have been especially shy and ashamed. I have been trying to look no one in the face. Even the creaking of a chair could make me shudder. And today too I had drawn my head in like a turtle more dead than alive, so that Yefim Akimovich (the worst practical joker in the world) said for all to hear: "Why are you, Makar Alexeyevich, sitting there like a...." And here he made such a funny face that they all shouted with laughter. And, of course, they went at it again. But I just shut my eyes, flattened my ears and pretended neither to hear nor to see. This is the best way to make them leave me alone. All of a sudden there was a commotion far away and then my name was mentioned—I could hardly believe it: it was me, Devushkin, whom they were calling. My heart missed several beats—I don't know why I was so frightened, more frightened than ever in my life. I was rooted to the chair and

did not stir—as if it was not me they were calling. And the voices were coming nearer and nearer until they were near my head. "Devushkin, Devushkin! Where is Devushkin?" I looked up and there stood Yevstafy Ivanovich saying: "His Excellency is calling for you, Makar Alexeyevich. You have spoilt that document!" That was all, but it was enough, wasn't it? I turned cold all over and almost lost consciousness. How I got up and walked I don't know. I can't even say what I was thinking about at the moment. I remember only that we passed through one room, then another, and still another, into the private office where I *stood confronted*! There were His Excellency and all the others! I'm afraid I forgot even to bow. I stood there with trembling lips and shaking knees, and with good reason, my darling own: firstly, I happened to glance at the mirror to the right and what I saw there was enough to drive a man stark mad! And secondly, I had always behaved as if I had never existed and how should His Excellency know that I existed at all? Perhaps he had heard someone mention a Devushkin in the ministry, but had never troubled to know him better.

"What is the meaning of this?" he began angrily. "Why are you not more careful? It was an urgent document and you have spoilt it!" His Excellency now turned to Yevstafy Ivanovich and I could hear only snatches of what he said. "Such negligence.... Extra trouble...." Several times I opened my mouth—to apologize, but no sound came. I should have liked to run away, but dared not. And then came the worst, something so awful, my darling, that my pen trembles for shame! A button on my coat, the devil take it, a button that was hanging by a single thread suddenly broke off and hopped and skipped, jingling and rolling to the very feet of His Excellency. And this amid the general silence. This is what came instead of an apology. This was my only answer to His Excellency. The consequences are too horrible to describe. His Excellency turned his eyes upon me, noting the details of my figure and my dress. I remembered what I had seen in the mirror and—stooped to capture that button. What possessed me to do it! I snatched at it, but the thing kept rolling and spinning; and so you see, I also distinguished myself by my gracefulness. I felt my senses leaving me. All was lost: my reputation and all, irretrievably lost! In the jumble of my mind

I could somehow hear the shrieks and shouting of Faldoni and Theresa and the gossip of a thousand tongues. Finally, I overtook the button, arose and stiffened. I should have stood perfectly still with my hands at my sides. But no! I had to fiddle with that button, push it on the broken threads as though it could stick on again. And all the time I was smiling. Yes, just smiling. His Excellency turned away, then gave me another glance and said to Yevstafy Ivanovich: "What does this mean? Just look at the man! What is the matter with him?" Oh dearest, think of it: "What is the matter with him?" I had distinguished myself, had I not? And Yevstafy Ivanovich answered him: "An absolutely clean record, conduct exemplary, salary according to the rates." "Well, help him somehow," said His Excellency. "Let him have something in advance." "But he has already drawn all that is coming to him. Circumstances led him to do it since his conduct is excellent, his record is clean, absolutely clean. There is nothing against him." I was burning in the fires of hell, my darling. "Well, well," said His Excellency so that I could hear. "Let the paper be copied again as quickly as possible. Devushkin, come here. Copy this paper without a mistake, and listen...." Here His Ex-

cellency dismissed the others and we were left alone. Hurriedly drawing a wallet from his pocket, he picked out a hundred-ruble banknote and pressed it into my hand. "Here . . . regard it as a loan, if you like. I'd like to do something for you." I started, my angel, I was struck dumb, hardly knowing what was happening. I would have kissed his hand, but he turned very red, the dear man, and then—I am not exaggerating one bit, Varenka—he actually took my unworthy hand in his and shook it as if I were his equal. "You had better go now," he said. "Sorry I cannot do more for you. Make no more mistakes. We'll share the blame for what's happened."

Now here is what I ask of you and Fedora, my own: please pray for His Excellency every day. And if I had children I would ask them also to pray for His Excellency even more than they would for their own father. In all seriousness, I will say this too, my own—I am in earnest, my little girl—that no matter how I have suffered, regardless of the anguish I have felt on your account in the days of our worst need when I looked at you and was so humiliated by my inability to help, in spite of all this, I swear that these hundred rubles are not as dear to me as the fact that he, His Ex-

cellency, shook me by the hand, the hand of a scarecrow and a drunkard. He has made a man of me again. He has restored my spirit and sweetened my life for all time. And I am strongly convinced that, sinful though I may be, my prayers for His Excellency will be answered.

Varenka, I am very agitated, I am utterly distraught. My heart is leaping from my breast and I am very weak. I am sending you forty-five rubles in bills. I shall give twenty to my landlady, which will leave me thirty-five. I will take about twenty to repair my clothing and there will be fifteen for other needs. The impressions of this morning have upset me completely. I had better lie down. And yet I am composed and my mind is at ease. Only my soul aches somehow and deep within I can hear it trembling and stirring. I shall visit you later. Just now I am too dizzy after all these happenings. God sees all, my darling, my priceless little girl! Your friend,

Makar Devushkin

September 10

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am very happy to hear of your good fortune and fully appreciate the kindness of your

chief. Now you may have a rest from your cares. But don't squander your money, for the love of God. Live quietly and as modestly as you can and begin to save a bit every day so that misfortune will not find you unprepared. Please do not worry about us. Fedora and I will manage somehow. Why have you sent us so much money, Makar Alexeyevich? We really do not need so much—we were satisfied with what we had. It is true that we shall need money to move to another house, but Fedora hopes to receive repayment of an old debt. I leave twenty rubles for emergencies and send back the rest. Take care of your money, Makar Alexeyevich. Good-bye. May you rest from your cares; be well and in good spirits. I would write more if I were not so tired. Yesterday I kept to my bed. I am glad that you have promised to visit me. Yes, please do.

V. D.

September 11

Varvara Alexeyevna, my own darling,

Please do not go away now that I am so happy and content. Don't listen to Fedora, dear, and I will do everything you want me to do. I will behave properly, if only out of

respect for His Excellency. We shall again be writing happy letters to one another as we used to and share each other's joys and troubles, if there are any troubles. We will live in harmony and peace. Again, we shall take up literature. Everything has changed for the better in my life, Varenka. The landlady has grown friendlier, Theresa more intelligent and even Faldoni more willing. I have made up with Ratazyaev. I was so happy that I went to him myself. He is a good fellow at heart, my darling; and all the evil things people have said about him are nonsense. He has never intended to put us in a book. He told me so himself and read to me some of his new writings. As for calling me Lovelace, he has explained that it is not really an indecent word or a bad name, but only a word borrowed from a foreign language and meaning a shrewd fellow. Or, to put it in a more elegant and bookish way it is the same as saying: "A sharp young gentleman!" That is all. And so, it was only an innocent joke, my angel, which I, an ignoramus, have misunderstood. I have apologized. And the weather, too, has been beautiful today. It is true that there was a drizzle and a light frost in the morning, but this has only freshened the air. I have bought

a fine pair of shoes. I took a walk in Nevsky and stopped to read *The Bee*.* Oh, I have forgotten to tell you the main thing: this morning I got into a conversation with Yemelyan Ivanovich and Aksenty Mikhailovich about His Excellency. I found I am not the only one to whom he has acted kindly. His Excellency is known for his kind heart; many have praised him and many have wept for gratitude. They say that he once adopted an orphan and later married her off to a man of importance, a clerk on special errands for His Excellency. It is known, too, that he once found a post for the son of a widow and that he has performed many other good deeds besides. I felt it my duty to add something to all this and told my story to the others, keeping back nothing. I just pocketed my shame; and, after all, what talk can there be of shame under such circumstances. Let His Excellency's good deeds be praised for all to hear. I spoke warmly, was carried away and, far from blushing, was even proud to have such a thing to tell. I told them everything (but said nothing of you, of course). I told them all about my landlady and Faldoni and Ratazyaev and my shoes and

* *Severnaya Pchela (The Northern Bee)*—a newspaper.—*Ed.*

about Markov, in short, about everything. Some of them laughed, or rather, all of them laughed. Perhaps there was something funny about my figure or about my shoes. Oh yes, now I'm sure it was my shoes. They could not have meant it badly. It is simply that they are young and well off. Surely, they were not malicious. How could they laugh at the expense of His Excellency? Now could they, Varenka?

I am still overcome, my darling. The events have confused me so. Have you enough firewood? Take care of yourself, Varenka, and don't catch cold. Ah, my own darling, your melancholy thoughts hurt me so. I keep praying to God about it. Have you got woollen stockings or some warm things to wear? Be kind to an old man and tell him if there is anything you need. Just apply to me. The bad times are over and the future is bright.

Those were sad times we had, Varenka, but they are gone for good and as the years pass we shall be sighing for them too. I remember my young days. There were occasions when I had not a kopek to my name, but was happy for all that. In those days a lovely face I had seen in Nevsky in the morning would be enough to keep me happy all day. Those were the times. It is good to live, Varenka, especial-

ly in St. Petersburg. Yesterday I prayed to God with tears in my eyes and pleaded to be forgiven for those sins of mine during our troubles: for complaining, for liberal thoughts and my indulgence. I thought of you during my prayers with tenderness. It was you who fortified me, comforted me and gave me good advice. I shall never forget it, my own darling. Today I kissed all your letters one by one, my dear. Good-bye, my own Varenka. I have heard that there is a service coat for sale in the neighbourhood. Perhaps I should inquire? Good-bye, my little angel, good-bye.

Your affectionate,
Makar Devushkin

September 15

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am greatly agitated. I have the worst of forebodings! Judge for yourself: this is what happened. Mr. Bykov is in St. Petersburg. Fedora has met him. He was riding in a droshky, but descended when he saw Fedora, approached her and asked where she lived. When Fedora refused to tell him, he said with a little laugh that he very well knew who was staying with her. (Anna Fyodorovna must have

told him.) Fedora could not contain herself and began to scold him roundly, saying that he was an immoral man and the cause of my unhappiness. To this he observed that I must be unhappy indeed since I had not a kopek. Fedora then told him that I could have earned my living by working, or married someone, or found a situation, but that thanks to him I was ill and going to die. To this he said that I was too young and wild and that *my virtues had become somewhat tarnished too* (his exact words). Fedora and I had thought that he did not know where we lived, but yesterday, just as I went out to do some shopping in Gostiny Dvor, he suddenly came to our room. He seemed to have come intentionally when I was not at home. He then asked Fedora many questions about me and about our life, inspected everything, my handiwork too and finally asked: who is that clerk with whom you are acquainted? You were just crossing the yard at the moment and Fedora pointed to you. He looked and only smiled again. Fedora asked him to go away, said that I was ill through my troubles, and that to see him would be highly unpleasant to me. To this he did not answer, but then remarked that he had just dropped in for want of something better to do.

He then offered her twenty-five rubles which she, of course, declined. What does all this mean? Why did he come? How did he manage to learn everything about us? I am lost in conjectures. Fedora says that Axinia, her sister-in-law, who comes to see us sometimes, knows Nastasia, the washwoman, and Nastasia's cousin is a watchman at the ministry where Anna Fyodorovna's nephew's acquaintance serves. That, undoubtedly, is how Anna Fyodorovna has got wind of it. But perhaps Fedora is mistaken. We don't know what to do. Will he come again? I am terrified at the thought. When Fedora told me all this yesterday, I nearly fainted. What else could he want of me? I refuse to see them any more. Why should he pursue me, a poor girl? I am in constant fear. What if Bykov should come again this very minute? What is in store for me? Come to see me immediately, Makar Alexeyevich! Please come at once, come for God's sake.

V.D.

September 18

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dear,

On this date an unexpected and quite inexplicable event took place in our house. Our

poor Gorshkov has cleared himself completely. The decision was passed long ago and today he went to hear the final verdict. The case turned out very fortunately for him. Whatever fault was his in the way of negligence has been condoned. He has been awarded a handsome sum in damages from the merchant and so his circumstances have improved and his reputation has been cleared. In short, everything has improved: his best expectations have been fulfilled. He returned at three in the afternoon, pale as a ghost, his lips trembling, but smiling nonetheless. He embraced his wife and children, and we came to him in a crowd to congratulate him. He was greatly moved, bowed continuously and shook hands several times with each of us. He seemed to have grown taller somehow and his back straighter; and the usual moisture in his eyes was gone. How excited he was, the poor man! He could not stand still for a minute, kept picking things up and putting them down, kept smiling and bowing, sitting down and getting up, saying anything that came to his mind, words about his honour, his good name and his children. He even wept. Most of us, too, had tears in our eyes. Probably intending to encourage him, Ratazyaev said: "What is the good of honour, my friend,

when there is nothing to eat. The money is what matters; that is what you should be thankful for," and he patted him on the shoulder. It seemed to me that Gorshkov was offended by this. It was not that he expressed his displeasure directly, but he gave Ratazyaev a strange look and removed the hand from his shoulder. He would never have done such a thing before. Characters differ of course. I, for instance, would not have been so proud on such a joyous day. There are occasions when one bows an extra time and even humiliates oneself for no other cause than excess of good feeling and softness of heart. But why talk about myself? "Yes," Gorshkov said, "the money is a good thing too. God be thanked for it!" Again and again he kept saying: "God be thanked for it!" His wife ordered a better and more abundant dinner and the landlady herself did the cooking. Our landlady is a kind woman in her own way. Waiting for dinner, Gorshkov was very restless and visited all the rooms, whether invited or not. He would just enter, smile, take a seat, say something or perhaps nothing at all and then get up and go away. In the naval officer's room he was invited to play a hand as a fourth partner. As a result he completely confused the game for them,

made three or four absurd leads and went away saying: "I just thought I'd play a game or two." Meeting me in the passage, he took me by both hands, looked me straight in the eye, but in a very queer way, then pressed my hands once more and went off, still smiling, but again in a queer way, a forced, somewhat lifeless smile. His wife was weeping for joy and everything in their room seemed so festive. After dinner he said to his wife: "I think I'll rest a little." For a while he lay, stroking his little daughter's head.Then he turned to his wife and asked: "Where is our Petenka?" His wife at once crossed herself and reminded him that Petenka was dead. "Oh, yes," he agreed. "Petenka is in heaven." She saw that he was not himself, that the event had put him out, and urged him to go to sleep. "I'll do that ... I'll sleep a little." Then he turned aside, lay still for a while and turned his head again as though to speak. She did not understand and asked him what he had said, but he did not answer. Believing him asleep she went to visit the landlady and stayed for an hour. When she returned she found him still asleep and sat down to do some work. She was busy for half an hour and forgot all about him. But something made her start up with fear. It was the

deadly stillness. She looked at the bed and saw that he had not changed his position. She came up to him and saw that he was dead—he had died, poor Gorshkov, as if struck by lightning; and nobody knows why. I am confounded and can hardly come to myself. How can a man die like that? The poor fellow, this Gorshkov. What a life he had, what a life! His wife was in tears and so frightened and his little girl had shrunk away in a corner. Such a commotion then arose. There is to be a post-mortem, so I have heard. I am sorrier than I can say; which of us can foretell the hour?... Here today and gone tomorrow!

Your,
Makar Devushkin

September 19

My dearest Varvara Alexeyevna,

I hasten to inform you that Ratazyaev has found some work for me with a writer. He came to Ratazyaev with a very thick manuscript —much work, thank God. Unfortunately, his handwriting is so illegible that I don't know how to go about it. It has to be done quickly and it is written in such a queer way that one

cannot make out the text. We have agreed to the price of forty kopeks a sheet. I am writing this to let you know that I shall have some additional money. Good-bye, my darling own. I must get down to work now.

Your constant friend,
Makar Devushkin

September 23

Makar Alexeyevich, my dear friend,

I have not written to you these three days and in the meantime I have had much trouble and worry. The day before yesterday Bykov came to see me again. I was alone, since Fedora had gone out somewhere. When I opened the door to him I was so frightened that I could hardly move. I must have turned very pale. He entered with his usual loud laugh, took a chair and sat down. Finally I regained my composure and sat down to work in the corner. His smile soon faded as he took a closer look at me. I have grown so thin of late. My cheeks and eyes are sunken and I must have been as white as a sheet. Perhaps those who knew me a year ago would find it difficult to recognize me now. For a time he sat there,

looking closely and then grew merry again. He said something. Just what I answered I cannot remember, and he laughed again. He was here for a whole hour, talking and asking questions. Getting ready to leave, he took me by the hand and said (to quote his exact words): "Between you and me, Varvara Alexeyevna, this Anna Fyodorovna, your relative and my close acquaintance, is a vile creature." To this he added a grosser word. "She has led your cousin Sasha astray and ruined you as well. As for me, I have behaved like a scoundrel, of course. It's a common failing with men," and he laughed at the top of his voice. Then he observed that he was not much of a speaker. He had said the main thing, however, the thing that his sense of honour had compelled him to say, and now he intended to say the rest very briefly. Then and there he told me that he sought my hand, that he regarded it his duty to restore my honour, that he was wealthy and that after our wedding he would take me to his village in the steppes where he intended to hunt hares; he would not come to St. Petersburg any more because it was a nasty town; he had a worthless nephew in the city whom he had sworn to cut off without a kopek and that this was to be the reason for

his marriage: he wanted a direct heir. Then remarking that I lived very poorly, he said it was no wonder that I looked ill, living in such a hole, and foretold my near death if I stayed another month. Lodgings in St. Petersburg were nasty, he added, and asked if there was anything that I needed.

I was so upset by his proposal that I wept; I don't know why. Mistaking my tears for an expression of gratitude, he declared that he had always been sure that I was a kind, feeling and learned girl, and yet he had hesitated to take this step until he had made the proper inquiries about me. He then asked a few questions about you and added that he had heard that you were a man of honourable principles and that he, for his part, did not wish to be indebted to you, and would five hundred rubles be enough for everything that you had done for me? When I explained that what you had done could not be paid for, he retorted that it was all nonsense: sheer novels, he called it, and added that I was still too young and probably fond of reading verses. Novels and verses were always the ruin of young girls, and books in general corrupted the morals and he detested them. If I had lived as long as he, I would be able to judge people better. Only

then would I know what people were like. He urged me to give careful consideration to his proposal because it would be unfortunate if I took such a step rashly. Rashness and thoughtlessness had always been the undoing of the young. Of course, he was anxious to have a favourable answer. Otherwise he would be compelled to marry a merchant's daughter in Moscow because he had sworn to disinherit that rascally nephew of his. Against my will, he left five hundred rubles on my embroidery frame, to buy some sweets, as he put it. In the country, he said, I would grow as round as a bun and live on the fat of the land. He was fearfully busy at present, and had been running about all day. And then he took his leave. My dear friend, I have thought long about all this and suffered much, but at last I have made up my mind. I am going to marry the man. I must agree to his proposal. If anyone can rid me of dishonour, restore my good name, and avert poverty, hardships and misfortunes, he is the man. What else can I expect of the future; what more can I ask from destiny? Fedora says that one should not miss one's happiness and that if this is not happiness, then what is? As for myself, I can see no other way, my friend. I'm working so much that I've ruined

my health. To be a governess or a servant? I would waste away from loneliness and would not suit anyone besides. I am sickly by nature and always a burden to someone. I realize that it is to no paradise I am going, but what shall I do? Just tell me, what shall I do? What choice have I?

I have not really asked for advice. I wanted to think it out alone. The decision you have read is unalterable and I shall announce it to Bykov, who is pressing me. He said that his affairs could not wait and that he could not postpone the wedding because of some fancies. God knows whether or not I shall be happy, but I shall entrust my fate to His inscrutable will. They say that Bykov is a kind man. He will respect me and perhaps I will learn to respect him too. What more can I expect of such a marriage?

I have told you all there is to say, Makar Alexeyevich, and am sure that you will understand. Do not try to dissuade me. You will not succeed! Weigh in your heart, for a moment, all that has led me to take this step. I was worried at first but now I am calmer. What awaits me, I do not know. The future is obscure. Come what may. His will be done!

Bykov has just arrived and I shall have to leave this letter unfinished, though I have much more to say.

V.D

September 23

Varvara Alexeyevna, my own,

I hurry to answer your letter, dear, and announce that I am perfectly amazed. There is something wrong somewhere. Yesterday, we buried Gorshkov. Yes, Bykov has acted nobly, of course. But have you really agreed, my darling? All is in God's hands, of course. That is undoubtedly true; and this too must be in God's hands; and the ways of our Maker are blessed though inscrutable, as are the ways of fate! No question about it! Fedora also approves of it. Now you will be happy, of course, living in content, my darling little dove, my little beautiful angel—but why so soon, Varenka? Ah yes, there are Mr. Bykov's affairs. Everyone has his affairs, of course; everyone has business to attend to.... I saw him leaving the house. He is an impressive man, more than impressive. But there is something wrong somewhere. The point is not that he is impressive, but that I am quite upset. How in the

world shall we write letters to each other now? And how shall I live alone? I am weighing all your reasons in my heart, as you asked me to. I'm just sitting here all the time and weighing. I was just copying the twentieth page of that manuscript when the news reached me. You are leaving, my darling, and must buy all kinds of things: frocks and shoes and all that. As it happens, there is a shop I know on Gorokhovaya. I have told you about it before, remember? But how can you leave now? The idea! You cannot go now. It is impossible, absolutely impossible! There are so many things to buy, and a carriage too! And the weather is bad; see how it is raining, coming down in buckets. And such a wet rain, too! And besides.... You will be cold. Your heart will be cold. Are you not afraid to ride off with a stranger? And what will be left for me? Fedora says you are very lucky, but she is a rowdy wench and thinks only of ruining me. Will you attend Vespers? I would go there to have a look at you. It is true, my darling, very true that you are a learned, virtuous and feeling girl. But he would do better to marry the merchant's daughter. Don't you think so, dear? Wouldn't he do better to marry the merchant's daughter? I'll drop in for an hour

after dark. It gets dark early now and I'll be sure to come. As soon as dusk falls I'll be sure to come. You are expecting Bykov now, and when he leaves I'll come. Just wait, my darling, I will drop in.

Makar Devushkin

September 27

My dear friend, Makar Alexeyevich,

Mr. Bykov says that I must have three dozen chemises of Dutch linen. I shall have to find a seamstress who can make two dozen, and there is so little time. Mr. Bykov is irritated, saying that these fripperies are too troublesome. Our wedding is to take place in five days; and on the next day we are to leave. Mr. Bykov is in a hurry and thinks it a shame to waste so much time. I have been running about so much that I scarcely have the strength to stand. There is so much to do and so much that had better be left undone. And another thing: we have not enough *blonde* or lace, and there is no one to buy it. Mr. Bykov says that he does not want his wife to look like a scullery maid and that I must put the noses of the local ladies out of joint, as he puts it. Could you go to Madam Chiffon in Gorokhovaya and

ask her to send a seamstress or to be kind enough to come herself. I am not well today. Our new flat is cold and so untidy. Mr. Bykov has an aunt who is so old and ill that I am afraid she may die before our departure. Mr. Bykov says that it is nothing, that she will come round after all. Everything is in such disorder. Mr. Bykov does not live here and the servants keep running off, God knows where. There are times when there is only Fedora to do the work. Mr. Bykov's valet who is generally in charge has been gone for three days. Mr. Bykov comes here every morning and is always angry. Yesterday he thrashed the steward which led to trouble with the police. There has been no one to bring you my letters, and I will post this one. Oh, I have almost forgotten the most important thing. Tell Madame Chiffon that she should alter the *blonde* according to yesterday's sample. Perhaps she could come herself and show me the new patterns. Tell her, too, that I have changed my mind about the *canesou*: it should be done in *crocher*. And the monograms on the handkerchiefs should be in tambour and not satin stitch. The word is "tambour." Will you remember? I have almost forgotten another thing: please, tell her that the lappets of the fur cloak must

be raised and that the gussets should be braided and the collar fringed with lace or broad falbala. You won't forget, will you?

Your,

V.D

P.S. I'm ashamed to trouble you with my errands. The day before yesterday too you were running about all morning. But I can't help it, really! There is not even a semblance of order here and I am ill. So do not be angry with me, Makar Alexeyevich. I am so depressed. What is to become of me, my dear, my kind Makar Alexeyevich. I am afraid to look into the future. I am troubled by forebodings and am living in a maze.

P.P.S. Please do not forget what I have asked you. I am afraid that you may make a mistake. Do not forget: in tambour and not satin stitch.

V.D.

September 27

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

I have carefully carried out all your instructions. Madame Chiffon told me that she herself would do it in tambour stitch which is more

suitable or something—I didn't quite understand. She said something about falbala, but I have forgotten what. All I can remember is that she spoke a good deal about falbala; she's a maddening old hag! What else did she talk about? She had better tell you herself. I am half-dead with running about and have not been to the office today. But don't worry on my account, darling. I'm ready to run to every shop in the city for your peace of mind. You say that you are afraid to look forward, but then you will know everything at seven o'clock. Madame Chiffon has promised to come. Don't be downhearted, my darling. Perhaps everything is for the best. So there! I can't get that cursed falbala out of my mind. Ekh, all that falbala—falbala! I would come to see you, my darling, I certainly would. I have in fact passed the gates of your house twice, but Bykov, that is, Mr. Bykov is always so angry that I really.... Well, it can't be helped.

Makar Devushkin

September 28

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Please, please, run to the jeweller's immediately and tell him that he needn't make the

pearl and emerald ear-rings. Mr. Bykov says the price is painfully high. He is rather annoyed and says that all this has cost him plenty already and that he is being robbed. Yesterday, too, he said that if he had anticipated such expenses he would have never committed himself. He said that as soon as we are married we shall go away and have no guests and that I should not expect to be dancing about and entertaining people soon, that there are no occasions for celebration so far. That is the way he talks. God knows that I don't care at all for these things and that Mr. Bykov himself has ordered them. I did not answer him because he is too easily irritated. What is to become of me?

V.D.

September 28

Varvara Alexeyevna, my darling child,

I.... That is, all is well as regards the jeweller. As for myself, I first meant to say that I am ill and in bed. I had to fall ill just when there are so many things to do, cursed luck! To complete my misery, His Excellency was recently very angry and he shouted at Yemelyan Ivanovich until his breath gave out, poor

man. That is what I wish to tell you. I would like to write more, but am afraid to cause you unnecessary trouble. I am a plain, not very clever man, and write whatever comes to my mind; so that you may find that some of the things I scribble are not quite as they should be. Well, it doesn't matter really.

Your,
Makar Devushkin

September 29

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dear little girl,

I met Fedora today, my darling, and she said that you would be wed tomorrow and will leave the day after tomorrow and that Mr. Bykov had already hired the horses. I have already told you that piece of news about His Excellency. What else? Ah yes, I have looked over those bills sent by that shop in Gorokhovaya. Everything is correct but very expensive. Why should Mr. Bykov be angry with you? Well, may you be happy for ever after, my darling. I will be so glad to know that you are happy. I would attend the ceremony if not for the pain

in my back. To mention the letters again.... Who will carry them? Fedora.... You have treated her handsomely. You are very kind. And for this God will bless you. Good deeds never go unrewarded, and virtue never fails to win the halo of divine justice. My darling, my only one, I should like to write to you every hour, every minute and just write and write and write. I have your book, *The Tales of Ivan Belkin.* Please, leave it with me, my dear. It is not that I want to read it so much. But as you know, winter is near and the evenings will be long and sad, and that will be the time for reading. I will move from my flat into your old one where Fedora is now living. I will never part with that honest woman. She is so industrious, you know! Yesterday I visited your empty room, walked about and looked at things. And there, in the corner, stood your darling little embroidery frame with even a piece of work in it that you had been doing. I examined it and saw some other odds and ends. I was so happy to see that you had used one of my letters as a spool to wind your silk. On the table too I found a scrap of paper with words: "My dear Makar Alexeyevich, I hasten to...." Someone must have interrupted you just then. And in the corner behind the screen

I found your little bed. My poor, dear little dove! Well good-bye, good-bye, my dear. Please answer soon.

Makar Devushkin

September 30

Makar Alexeyevich, my constant and truest friend,

The thing is done, the die is cast. What awaits me I do not know, but will submit to His will. Tomorrow we leave and I am writing these lines in farewell, my closest friend, my protector, my soul. Don't grieve for me. Be happy, remember me and may God be with you always. I will remember you and always mention your name in my prayers. And so ends the life that I have led here. Most of what I shall remember will give me little comfort in the future, but all the dearer will be my memory of you. You are my only friend, the only person who loved me. I saw and knew that you loved me. My smile alone or a single line from me was enough to make you happy. Now you shall have to forget me. How lonely you will be! Who will there be to comfort you? My kind and only friend! I shall leave you the book and the

embroidery frame and the letter that I once began. Read the first lines again and imagine what pleases you for the rest. God knows what I would have written! Remember your poor Varenka who loved you so well. I have left all your letters in the upper drawer of Fedora's dresser. You write that you are ill, but Mr. Bykov would not let me go out today. I shall write to you, of course, but God knows what may happen and so we had better say good-bye, my own darling, my own treasure! I would love to embrace you. Good-bye, my friend, good-bye. Be well and happy always! I will pray for you. My heart is heavier than I can say. Mr. Bykov is calling.

Your ever loving,

V.

P.S. My soul is so full, so full of tears. The tears are suffocating me. Good-bye! Good God! Remember your poor Varenka!

* * *

Varenka, my dear, my dove, my very own!

You are being carried off from me. You are going! I would rather they had torn the heart out of me! How could you let them? You are

weeping and yet going. Your letter still wet with tears has just now reached me. And so you do not really want to go; and so they are making you.... And so you are sorry for me.... And so you love me. Who will take care of you now? Your little heart will be so sad and cold. Grief will eat it away, sadness will break it, you'll die there alone and they will bury you in the cold earth with no one to weep over the grave. Mr. Bykov will be busy hunting hares. Ah, my darling, how could you have taken such a step? What have you done! What violence have you done to yourself? They will drive you to the grave, jostle you out of the world. You are only a little feather, my little angel. And where was I? What was I doing? I saw that the child had a fancy, that the child was ill. I should have simply—but no! I behaved like a fool, thought of nothing and saw nothing as though it were no concern of mine. Good God! I was running about after falbala. No Varenka, I shall rise from my bed. I shall recover tomorrow and rise from my bed. I shall throw myself under the wheels of your carriage. I shall not let you go! It's an outrage! What right have they! I will go with you—I'll run behind your carriage if you won't take me. I'll run until I fall! Where are you going?

Do you know? I shall tell you! You are going to the steppes, to the steppes as bare and naked as the palm of my hand. Whom will you see there? Hard work-worn peasant wives and their rude, drunken men. Even the trees have been blasted there by the rains and cold. That is where you are going! Mr. Bykov will be busy with his hares, and you? Do you want to be a landowner's wife, my darling? Then look at yourself, my little cherub. Are you at all like a landowner's wife? It's out of the question, Varenka! To whom shall I write my letters then? Just stop to think for a moment! To whom shall I write? Whom shall I call "Varenka" then? Whom shall I call by that sweet name? Where will I find you then, my little angel. I will die, of course, Varenka. I shall never survive such a misfortune. I loved you as the very light of God, as my own daughter. I loved everything in and about you. My darling! I have lived for you alone. I have worked and copied my papers and walked and set down my observations in loving letters only because you were near. Perhaps you have never realized this, but it has been so. Now listen again: how can it be that you are going away? You can't! It's quite impossible. Altogether out of the question! It is raining and

you are sure to catch cold—you are so weak, so frail. And the carriage roof is sure to leak. The carriage will break down; it will surely break down the moment you go out of town. You can never tell: the Petersburg carriage-makers are abominable. They are only concerned with the fashion and the elegant frills, but they cannot build solidly; they cannot, I swear! I will throw myself on my knees before Mr. Bykov, my darling. I will prove it to him, prove it to them all. And you, my sweet dear, reason with him too. Tell him that you must stay here and cannot go. Oh why didn't he marry that merchant's daughter in Moscow! It would have been so much better if he had. The merchant's daughter is more suitable. By far more suitable! I'm sure of it. And then you could stay here, with me! And why do you need Mr. Bykov? How has he endeared himself to you? Surely not because of falbala! What is falbala anyway? Why even mention falbala? It is nonsense, my darling. Here it is a matter of life and death and not of falbala! Falbala is only a piece of cloth; falbala is only a worthless rag. Just wait until I receive my salary and I'll buy all the falbala you want, my darling. In that shop, you remember? Just wait until I receive my salary, my sweetest cherub!

Oh Varenka, good God! And so you must go away with Mr. Bykov? For ever? Oh Varenka! No, you must write again, just one letter more! And from the steppes write once again! If you don't, then the letter that I have now will be the last; and surely that is impossible: it cannot be the last. How could it be? All of a sudden—the last letter! I'll be writing to you just the same. And you write to me too. My style is just taking shape now.... What style? I hardly know what I am saying and what I am writing about, and it doesn't matter as long as I keep on writing and writing.... My little dove, my one and only one—my darling!